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RUSKIN

A STUDY IN PERSONALITY

BY

ARTHUR CHRISTOPHER BENSON

FELLOW OF MAGDALENE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

98531

". . . et vox prima, quam audivi, tamquam tubae loquentis mecum, dicens; Ascende huc, et ostendam tibi quae oportet fieri post haec."

LONDON

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1911

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To

Stuart Alexander Donaldson

Master of Magdalene College

THIS BOOK

is by his old friend and colleague
respectfully and affectionately Dedicated

NOTE

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A. C. B.

PREFACE

THE following volume consists of seven lectures on the life and work of Ruskin, delivered in the Hall of Magdalene College, Cambridge, in the Michaelmas term of 1910. I had intended vaguely to recast them in a more formal shape; not because they were not carefully compiled and composed, but because they were written as lectures to be heard, and not as a book to be read. But I found on reflection that this would entail rewriting the whole book on an entirely different scheme. Nor indeed do I think that another small biography of Ruskin is required; though a great and full biography of him is needed, and is being written, I understand, by Mr. E. T. Cook, the editor of the large standard series of Ruskin's complete works. The situation is, of course, at present somewhat complicated by nearness of view and considerations of personal intimacies; but the time is not far off when we shall be able to realise what the ultimate effect of his work and message has been upon the world.

I felt then that these lectures might, as lectures, have a certain freshness which they would lose if

transmuted into a treatise; and they must be looked upon rather as an attempt to emphasise and bring home certain salient features and characteristics of the man, than an attempt at synthesis and summary. This book is, accordingly, a sketch and not a finished portrait; it is frankly compiled from accessible sources; but it is written with a sincere love and admiration, and with a strong belief that Ruskin's message and example have a very real truth and strength of their own, urgently needed in these hasty and impulsive days. It would be absurd to say that the fame and name of Ruskin are eclipsed, but his works have passed into that region of deferential acceptance, in which they are more respected than examined, and more reverenced than read; and this state of things I earnestly desire to alter. I have written these pages, then, with the hope of provoking a discriminating interest in the man's life and work, and with the wish to present a picture of one of the most suggestive thinkers, the most beautiful writers, and the most vivid personalities of the last generation.

ARTHUR C. BENSON.

THE OLD LODGE,
MAGDALENE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.
Feb. 17, 1911.

RUSKIN: A STUDY IN PERSONALITY

LECTURE I

I

BEFORE I begin to speak of the life and work of Ruskin, I must suggest to you a few books which it would be an advantage to you to read, or at all events to glance at. Ruskin's was a long life, full of work and energy, and moreover he came into contact with many very prominent and active persons, to whom I shall be bound to allude. It will therefore be difficult for you to follow the drama of his life without knowing something about the people with whom he came into close touch.

There is an admirable life of Ruskin by Professor Collingwood, from which I shall have occasion to quote, and to which I am much indebted. Professor Collingwood was Ruskin's secretary for some years. The life is both faithful and picturesque, and much enriched by appropriate quotations, though much material, now

accessible, was not then available. But the effect of Ruskin was so overpowering upon his immediate circle, that Professor Collingwood, in his devotion and piety, and with the memory of his hero so fresh and vivid in his mind, could not possibly be frankly critical. The book is certainly by far the best existing study of Ruskin's life and personality, and my debt to it, throughout all the biographical part of these lectures, is obvious and great.

Then there is a stimulating and suggestive monograph by Mr. Frederic Harrison in the *Men of Letters* series. Mr. Harrison combines an intense admiration for Ruskin with a power of clear-sighted and judicious criticism. The only point about the volume which does not seem to me wholly satisfactory is its scale and proportion. But of course this is a matter of individual taste and judgment, and the book undoubtedly contains the best critical estimate of Ruskin, and is very just and illuminating.

Then there is a charming sketch of the intimate side of Ruskin's personality, by Lady Ritchie, Thackeray's daughter, in a little volume called *Tennyson, Ruskin and Browning.*

There is a readable book called *Ruskin and his*

Circle, by Miss Earland, which furnishes a good background for the life.

There is also a little book in the *Modern English Writers* series, by Mrs. Meynell, which gives an able and judicious summary of Ruskin's principal writings. The book is highly concentrated, and the style, which maintains a high level of literary beauty, is almost inevitably allusive and even intricate. I would warmly recommend the book to any one who wishes to grasp the drift and inner spirit of Ruskin's writings. And I would here express my own sense of high obligation to the volume, for the guidance which, in its fine suggestiveness, it has afforded me.

Of course I need hardly say that to get any real conception of the scope of Ruskin's work, it is advisable to read some of his own books. I can hardly expect that many of my hearers will work faithfully through the great edition in thirty-seven volumes. It is a monumental work, full of exact information and elaborate references; the introductions are admirably written, and the pictorial illustrations are excellent. But fortunately most of the best-known works are available in cheaper and lighter editions. And so I would ask my hearers to read if possible the

Præterita of Ruskin, one of the most beautiful books in the English language, an autobiography which he never finished.

I would also ask you to read *Sesame and Lilies*, a book about books, which gives a fine example of his style and of his thought. And those who wish to get an idea of Ruskin's economical theories must carefully read his book, *Unto this Last*, without which it is impossible to understand his principles. And further, any one who is interested in his artistic ideas might find it possible to read the little shilling book published by George Allen —*The Nature of Gothic*—which is a chapter out of *The Stones of Venice*, and has the immense advantage of having a short preface by William Morris, which emphasises both forcibly and beautifully the strong points in Ruskin's art-teaching. Of course I hope that those who get so far will be inclined to go further afield; because lectures like these are not intended to give a substitute for Ruskin, in a tabloid form, but to act if possible as an invitation to study the man's own heart and mind; for no one ever gave so prodigally of both to his readers as Ruskin did, or, as the old text says, so laid his "body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over."

2

John Ruskin was born at 54, Hunter Street, Brunswick Square, on the 8th of February 1819. You may pass the house any day driving west from St. Pancras or King's Cross. The street is a semi-respectable one; parts of it are sordid and poverty-stricken, but as it draws near to Brunswick Square it settles down to a drab and dingy decorum, very characteristic of our great metropolis; and the house itself is precisely and typically the very house in which you would not expect so rare a flower of genius to bloom, and least of all adapted to nurture a passionate lover of beauty. But I never pass the place without a thrill of pleasure that there should have been born just there, on that particular spot of the earth and no other, where the sooty yellow-brick geometrical house-fronts rise into the smoke-stained skies of London, one who was to love so intensely the earth and all that grows out of the earth, and lies hid in it—both its hills and forests, its plains and lakes, as well as its trees and flowers, its rocks and mineral forms—and not only these; for the child that was born in that unlovely street was to

love, with the kind of love that most men reserve for mistress or child, the stately cities of the world their churches and palaces, their façades and columns; and not only to love them and grieve over their ruin and restoration alike, but to interpret their loveliness to others, and multiply that sense of beauty a thousandfold.

That house is now distinguished from the rest by a tablet, a disc like the top of a chocolate birthday-cake, with a record meanly written. I am glad too that it should be so ugly and sensible a halo. The worshippers of Ruskin might perhaps have put up some so-called appropriate design,—an angel holding on to a balustrade, or a Della Robbia plaque, to be grimed and stained by London smoke. But I rejoice that when we build the sepulchre of a prophet to whom we would not listen, we should do it in our own solid and commercial spirit, reckoning his reputation as a national asset, and grudging him to other nations, not because we prize his sweet and noble spirit, but because he brings money and credit into the country; just as the townsmen of Assisi hurried St. Francis home that he might die there, not because they could not bear that others should see his pain, or for love of his parting smiles, but

because they wanted to have authentic miracles of their own.

The father of John Ruskin was a man of sterling virtue, an excellent man of business, a wine-merchant, as his father was before him. With this difference, that his father lost a fortune and died insolvent; while the son not only paid his father's debts, but left a fortune of nearly two hundred thousand pounds. But he was not only "an entirely honest merchant," as the inscription on his tomb runs; he was also a man of taste and serious culture, a lover of good books and pictures and scenery, and transmitted to his son a deep and perfectly natural passion for beautiful things and beautiful thoughts. The mother must be confessed to have been a grim figure, with an intense devotion to her home circle, and an unconcealed contempt for the sloppiness of people in general. Ruskin gave many tender and humorous reminiscences of her in later life. He wrote once of her: "I don't think women were in general meant to reason. I never knew but one rational woman in my life, and that is my own mother (when one doesn't talk about actors or Mr. Gladstone, or anybody she has taken an antipathy to)." He recorded too that he had often

seen his mother travelling from sunrise to sunset of a summer's day without ever leaning back in the carriage. And he wrote in *Præterita*: "Whenever I did anything wrong or stupid or hard-hearted—and I have done many things that were all three—my mother always said, 'It is because you were too much indulged.'"

Much that is tedious has been written about the origin of the family—tedious, because at present we know so little about heredity and descent. Some day, no doubt, when Mendelism and eugenics are perfected, we shall breed a genius as easily as we breed a greyhound. And doubtless the secret of Ruskin's greatness is hidden safely enough in his austere pedigree. But there are one or two points of real interest about it. The name itself is of doubtful origin; and it matters little whether it is the same word as Erskine, or a mere nickname, Roughskin, or whether it is a diminutive, meaning the little red man. But it falls under the law which seems to assign to English men of genius quaint, striking, or beautiful names—and this is especially true of great writers; there is hardly a great English writer who has not borne a seemly name.

And then too there is another point. Ruskin

was the son of first cousins. This is apt to produce disasters of constitution, but it also produces greatness, for the simple reason that such an origin tends to accentuate and emphasise whatever qualities are there, by simple accumulation. If Ruskin owed to his birth the terrible mental collapse of his later life, it was perhaps the natural price he paid for his force and swiftness of spirit. And in this respect men of a later date, comfortably flattened out by eugenics into an even paste of virtue and efficiency, may look back with a romantic regret to the days when irregularities of temperament were made possible by our want of sense and knowledge.

Then, too, Ruskin was three parts Scotch, and what is more, Lowland Scotch. It cannot be mere chance that so many of our most forcible later writers, such as Carlyle and Walter Scott and Stevenson, have been sealed of the same tribe. I believe myself that the temperament of the Lowland Scotch is at once fiery and restrained, that it is naturally eloquent and emotional and religious, not sentimentally, but with a certain uplifted solemnity of heart; and then too the Lowland Scotch vocabulary is a singularly rich and elastic one, with all the resources of English, and with

many fine indigenous words. It is at least certain, in Ruskin's case, that he owed much to his inflexible Biblical training, of which I will speak in detail later. One whose memory was so retentive, and whose ear for the music of words so sensitive, did indisputably gain an incredible mastery of cadence and serious rhetoric from the restrained economy and the noble passion of Scriptural traditions. To tell a story with austere simplicity and stately directness; to be denunciatory without being abusive; to be indignant without ever losing self-control; not to be ashamed of deep and grand emotion; never to deviate into commonness or verbiage—these were some of the things that Ruskin acquired from his Bible reading; and this was a direct consequence of his Scotch descent.

And lastly, I have always thought it a supreme blessing that by birth and family he touched both ends of the social scale. A Scotchman never loses a certain pride of birth, however menial his state may be. Ruskin could trace his descent to more than one baronial family—the blood of old Robin Adair ran in his veins; but his grandmother kept an inn at Croydon; his aunt was married to a baker of the same place; his father's sister

married a tanner of Perth. I have a feeling that Ruskin did not quite like the homeliness of these associations; but with a fine sort of loyalty he not only did not disguise the facts, but put them prominently and literally forward. And it was perhaps the best point about his sheltered and secluded upbringing, that he was brought so closely into contact with simple people and lowly ways. It gave him an enormous power of making friendships rather than condescending alliances with servants and ordinary folk, and taught him to recognise that refined feeling and generous qualities are not the private property and the monopoly of well-to-do persons. Of course in these democratic days we know that "the rank is but the guinea-stamp"; but how many of us act upon it? How many of us would sincerely prefer to be befriended by a high-minded greengrocer rather than to be tolerated by a commonplace Viscount? There is a good deal of feudal deference in our subconscious instincts still—and the melancholy fact remains that we follow very faithfully the scriptural precept to make to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; and if we fail, there are always the everlasting habitations!

The point really is that Ruskin, by being

brought up in a simple household, where the servants were friends rather than hired assistants, and having never learnt to keep his distance, did undoubtedly learn what rich people often do not learn, to meet men and women of every class on perfectly equal and natural terms; and made friends accordingly with all, as far as it was in his power to make friends. For what strikes one as much as anything about Ruskin is that, in spite of his charm and grace and eager courtesy, he was an essentially lonely man; partly because of his dreams—a dreamer can never be very intimate with others—and partly too because he gave his heart away to beauty; and we have none of us more than a certain amount of love to give away. Thus the artist who must put not his mind only but his heart into his work must always have something incommunicable about him, beyond the reach of human fellowship.

In most respects, at first sight, there was nothing characteristically Scotch about Ruskin; the typical Scot is apt to be a little grim, a little unapproachable; genial he can be after a solid fashion; but he has little of the emotional abandon of the Celt, and little of the sentimentality of the Englishman. A character in the *Frogs* of Aris-

tophanes, when he thinks he is being unreasonably dictated to, says: "Don't come trespassing on my mind—you have a house of your own." And the typical Scot has the same detachment. He will never, for instance, allow emotion to invade business. He is canny, in fact. But Ruskin was not superficially canny. He met people, young and old alike, with a delightful welcome and open arms. He had an almost caressing address, and a cordial sweetness of manner. He was quixotically generous about money; there can have been few men who have ever given away in their lifetime so large a fortune. But there was a good deal of dogmatism and sternness behind, as his letters abundantly show; he had no slobbering charity for the world, or for the mistakes and failures of humanity. He was a merciless judge of frailty, and had the *saeva indignatio* of the satirist. He was, too, in his way a wary man of business; he made in later years as large an income by his books as he would have derived from his departed capital. He trod the narrow path between sentiment and silliness, saving himself from the former by causticity and from the latter by dryness. He did many things that seemed

alien to common sense, but when he let himself go it was rather in the direction of condemnation than in the direction of forgiveness. He was more on the side of punishment and obedience than on the side of rewards and freedom. And then, too, he had the spirit of loyalty and fidelity to lost causes and forlorn hopes, the spirit that has come out again and again in Scotch history. And thus the result of our investigation is that though a man of genius is a unique thing, and must be judged on his own merits, yet there are a good many traceable elements in the character and temperament of Ruskin which he owed to his race and to his nationality.

3

I shall not here attempt to tell the story of Ruskin's early life in any detail. My chief reason is that it has been told with such inimitable grace and felicity in his *Præterita* that it is impossible to retell it. But a few points must be noted. When he was four years old, his portrait was painted by Northcote, the R.A., of whom he inquired, after sitting for a few minutes, why there were holes in the carpet; and when the little boy was asked by the old painter what he would

have as the background, he said "Blue hills," which is a significant reply. He was fond, too, of preaching sermons from a convenient chair-back. "People, be good," ran the first sentence of the first recorded address. It was what he was saying for the rest of his life, though he varied the expression a little!

A few words must be said as to his education; it was absolutely unconventional, and though human temperament has a way of surviving a good many rough experiments in communicating bias, it is impossible not to see that his nurture affected him. In one respect his upbringing was ascetic. He had very few toys, he had to learn to amuse himself on the simplest lines; he was soundly whipped whenever he was naughty or wilful, and he was sheltered to an extraordinary extent from all external influences. He says that he never saw his parents lose their temper or heard their voices raised in anger, or saw even a glance of irritation pass between them, but that he suffered from having nothing to love. He states that he no more loved his parents than he would the sun and moon. They were just a part of the order of the universe. But people cannot be taught love, any more

than they can be prevented from loving; and it is clear that his preternatural activity of observation and intelligence were what really drained his emotions. He read the Bible with his mother, chapter by chapter; whether they were genealogical or improper, it mattered nothing. He was taught to draw, and he was dangerously encouraged to write. The day was seldom long enough for all he had to do. He wrote poetry and diaries and compilations. Indeed, through the whole of his early life his bent and his ambitions were poetical, though he hardly ever wrote a line of verse which is worth preserving on its intrinsic merits. He had no poetical invention whatever, and very little sense of rhythm. He had constant illnesses, and was never sent to school; and he thus lived a very comfortable and self-centred life with the two elderly parents, saved from discontent by intense activity of mind and great sweetness of disposition. His father's health was not good; he travelled constantly, both for business and pleasure, collecting orders for sherry, and visiting scenes and places of interest. Ruskin gained in this atmosphere one remarkable characteristic, the power of applying himself to his work with complete absorption,

wherever he might happen to be. His father intended him for the Church, and hoped to see him a Bishop; but he was to preach to a larger audience than a diocese could afford, and on wider lines than those of orthodox Anglicanism. But besides all this dilettante literature and sketching, he worked seriously enough at problems of geology and mineralogy. And he lived too in an atmosphere of culture; the family had moved out of London to Herne Hill, then a pleasant leafy suburb on the edge of the open country. His father bought pictures, and entertained artists and interesting people in a quiet way. It was a thoroughly precocious childhood, but one dares not say what should have been altered. Probably he lived too much with his elders, and thus acquired a certain touch of old-maidishness which never left him. There was lacking an element, not of virility, but of masculinity; and then too his mental activity was perilously stimulated. Perhaps the irritability of brain which worked havoc in his later life was partly caused by his prodigious precocity; but on the other hand the atmosphere of school life might have given him conventional standards and taken the edge off his originality; and

one is thankful for the net result, whatever its drawbacks may have been.

As he wrote in *Præterita*:—

"I was different, be it once more said, from other children even of my own type, not so much in the actual nature of the feeling, but in the mixture of it. I had, in my little clay pitcher, vialfuls, as it were, of Wordsworth's reverence, Shelley's sensitiveness, Turner's accuracy, all in one. A snowdrop was to me, as to Wordsworth, part of the Sermon on the Mount; but I never should have written sonnets to the celandine, because it is of a coarse yellow, and imperfect form."

He fell deeply in love at the age of seventeen with the daughter of his father's partner, Mr. Domecq. Adèle Domecq was a French girl, brought up in the best Parisian society, and a Roman Catholic. She and her sister came to stay at Herne Hill, and Ruskin fell a victim to a Byronic passion, accompanied by intense self-consciousness. The lively girls thought the clever boy rather a queer creature, and could not make him out; but it was a serious and devastating business, lasting for three years, and the result was a serious breakdown in health with symptoms of consumption.

Meanwhile he had been entered at Christ Church; and here again his parents behaved with characteristic prudence. He was made a Gentleman-commoner, which threw him into the society of the richest and most fashionable undergraduates; and his mother came up to Oxford to look after him. The danger was that he would become a gigantic joke; but his amazing simplicity and charm triumphed over all obstacles. He was half tolerated and half petted; but he made firm friends both among younger and older men; he won the Newdigate Prize Poem, and he plunged into print in the region of artistic controversy. He described his view of the Oxford life very characteristically in *Præterita*:—

"I am amused, as I look back, in now perceiving what an æsthetic view I had of all my tutors and companions—how consistently they took to me the aspect of pictures, and how I from the first declined giving any attention to those which were not well painted enough. My ideal of a tutor was founded on what Holbein or Dürer had represented in Erasmus or Melanchthon, or, even more solemnly, on Titian's Magnificoes or Bonifazio's Bishops. No presences of that kind appeared either in Tom or Peckwater; and even Doctor Pusey (who also never spoke to me) was not in the least a picturesque or tremendous

figure, but only a sickly and rather ill put together English clerical gentleman, who never looked one in the face, or appeared aware of the state of the weather."

It was at this time that his father began to buy Turner's pictures, and Ruskin made the acquaintance of the great artist whose fame he was afterwards to establish on so secure a basis. He wrote:—

"I found in him a somewhat eccentric, keen-mannered, matter-of-fact, English-minded gentleman; good-natured evidently, bad-tempered evidently, hating humbug of all sorts, shrewd, perhaps a little selfish, highly intellectual, the powers of the mind not brought out with any delight in their manifestations, or intention of display, but flashing out occasionally in a word or a look."

The account of his early years forms an extraordinary record of vigour and enthusiasm; but all this was suspended by his breakdown in health, caused undoubtedly by his love affair, and thus there fell on him in the middle of all his prosperity the first initiation into suffering of body and mind, the first taste of the cup of which he was afterwards to drink so deep. But he recovered, and finished his time at Oxford; and

it was then he learnt, as if by accident, his first lesson in that principle of art which he was afterwards to extol so matchlessly. It came in a drawing-lesson, where he made a study of an ivy tendril. Up to that time he had instinctively submitted to the artistic fallacy of the day, which treated artistic material as a thing to be manipulated and composed on conventional lines. It struck him that nature was not to be improved upon, and that absolute sincerity and fidelity were the first articles of the artistic creed. With what matchless rhetoric he persuaded himself and others to believe that Turner, who idealises landscape beyond all power of recognition and identification, was the supreme exponent of this principle, we shall see later. But this little incident was the first step on the ladder that he was about to climb, and must be allowed its due significance. And it was then that he abandoned all his dilettante pursuits. He made no more of his old composed drawings; he flung his pencil aside. "A few careful studies of grass-blades and Alpine-rose bells ended my Proutism, and my trust in drawing things out of my head for ever." He took up the task of vindicating the heroism of art; and he determined to show

the world that the foundations of art were sincerity and truth.'

4

Thus then at the age of twenty-three, this young man, with his mind as clear as light, and as full of eager vigour as a mountain stream, sat down in a lighthearted fashion to write one of the great books of the century—great not so much for its artistic permanence of form as for its driving and inspiring force. He wrote it in joy and delight, conscious of strength and purity, and this is written large over the page. He gave up all idea of being a bishop, and he refused disdainfully to enter the sherry business. And what was it that he intended to do? He meant, first of all, in *Modern Painters*, to take a little thesis; to prove at the outset that Turner was right in what he saw and what he drew of nature, and that most other painters had been wrong. How little he knew of other painters he was to show before long; but at present his equipment was this; he knew the works of a few English artists well, such as Gainsborough, Cox, de Wint, Copley Fielding, Prout, and Constable. He had seen too a good many English

galleries, and he knew what of older landscape artists the patrons of art conspired to admire —Salvator Rosa, Gaspar Poussin, Claude, and Hobbema. And he meant to dispose once and for all, as he says in a fine invective, of "the various Van somethings and Back somethings, more especially and malignantly those who have libelled the sea." All this he intended to overthrow and set right; and he meant too to lay down a new and a comprehensive philosophy of art.

He wrote the book at Herne Hill in the early mornings and for half the day; and he read it aloud, in simple childlike fashion, to papa and mamma, and received with outward deference their admiring criticisms.

The first principle that he states and maintains is that of Truth and Fidelity. He says that all the evil of the older landscape art has arisen from the painter endeavouring to modify the works of God, "casting the shadow of himself on all that he sees." But if this fidelity were all, art would become a mere imitation, and the photographer would be the best artist. Ruskin begins by showing that you do not see all that you think you see. If you see a brick wall at

a distance, you know it is a brick wall, and therefore in a spirit of fidelity you set to work to paint the bricks; but you do not actually see them. What you have really to paint is the effect which a brick wall has on the eye at a distance, that effect that makes you infer that it is made of bricks, even though you cannot see them; and he tells the story of a naval officer objecting to a picture by Turner of a man-of-war at a distance, that there were no port-holes—the fact being that at a distance you cannot see the port-holes.

But the other side of the thesis is that the true artist must select and combine, but never sacrifice reality. If you set yourself to paint all that you see, you might spend a long lifetime on a single picture, and leave it unfinished at the end. "There is . . . more ideality," he wrote, "in a great artist's selection and treatment of roadside weeds and brook-worn pebbles, than in all the struggling caricatures of the meaner mind, which heaps its foreground with colossal columns and heaves impossible mountains into the encumbered sky."

But here we are met by a difficulty at the outset; it begs the question to say that an artist

must not cast his own shadow on his works, if the next moment it is maintained that the strength of the artist lies in his power of selection and combination. The real truth is that no one exactly knows what lies behind the pleasure of art; or rather that it is so complicated a pleasure, and lies so much in the taste and power of the recipient, that it is impossible to lay down exact rules. What really matters is the quality of the mind that selects and interprets, and the charm which invests his skill. Art may be intensely life-like without being like life. What makes the difference is the personality of the artist, the way in which he interprets nature, and the emotions he can arouse by his presentation of it.

What somewhat vitiates the principles enunciated by Ruskin is that he admired Turner so intensely that he could not see his faults—indeed he loved them. Ruskin takes occasion, for instance, to praise the foregrounds of Turner, the figures and the detail. He scoffs at Claude for making the people in the foregrounds of his pictures principally occupied in carrying red trunks with locks about. But as a matter of fact the figures in Turner's foregrounds are often grotesque and ridiculous, and the detail childishly inaccurate

and absurd. The glory of Turner is in his vast sweep of mellow distances, indicating, by some subtle magic, forest and leafy hill and sunlit glade and winding river ; in the incredible spaciousness of his air, the secret gold of his cloud-veiled suns, the prodigal splendour of dawning or waning light. And Turner by his amazing assiduity and untiring observation, by years of hourly labour and by unerring fidelity of memory, saw and presented a whole host of things that no artist seems ever to have dared to see, much less to paint before. The perversity of Ruskin lay not in his praising Turner, but in his discrediting the work of those other great artists each of whom, except perhaps Salvator Rosa, who is a merely melodramatic scene-painter, has his own charm.

Turner left two great pictures by his will to the National Gallery, with the condition that they should be hung side by side with two great Claudes, with the intention that his own work should gain by juxtaposition with what was so false and unreal. For a time, no doubt, the patient sheeplike gazer obediently saw all the glory of Turner and all the vileness of Claude which Ruskin bade him see. But now any one who will look calmly at the two, will see that the Claudes

have an incomparable charm of their own. The golden sunlight of a great summer day falls with a mellow richness on vale and promontory, where the waves lap gently in the haze-hung bays. There is a sense of meditative content about the whole, the happy weariness that thinks gratefully of the end of labour and the coming in of the night. The scene is full of incommunicable romance; the ruined grass-grown temples, the embattled villas, the dim figures of men and women all have a life of their own, if one could but penetrate its secret. To deny the charm of Claude is to deny the sense of romance, the power of imagination which can build a wistful dream of what life could have been like, by disregarding for the moment the harsher elements, and leaving only the pure and beauty-haunted visions in which hope and memory are so rich, but which our human world, with its strange admixture of pain and darkness, make it so hard to realise and retain. The real fact was, and it may at once be stated, that Ruskin was not largely endowed with imagination. He had so clear a vision for the precise and definite forms of beauty which he could see, the world was to him so rich and various, that he did not or could not enter into the promise of

poetry. If this is not clearly understood, one is under an entire misconception, both of his powers and his limitations. His strength lay in his intense perception of what was there; but he was a moralist and not a poet; he had little sense of symbols, he had little touch of music in his composition. He saw the light on things so clearly, that he did not see the hidden light that falls through things. "I was only interested," he wrote, "by things near me, or at least clearly visible and present." He paid a heavy penalty for this in his days of later darkness; but in those early days, the rapture of light and colour and form so filled his heart and mind, that he did not see those further secrets which can only be guessed at and perceived, hardly shared or uttered, but the truth of which, if a man has once tasted them, has a sacredness that is beyond all words.

What further did he set himself to do? No less, as I have said, than to make a reasoned philosophy of all art. And he did this, not in a loose or vague way, but arguing like Aristotle and Euclid, as cogently and strictly as he knew how. Now it seems to me that though here he attempted an impossibility, it was all on the right lines; it is

only by the application of the scientific method to psychological things that we can penetrate human psychology; and though one may not be wholly convinced by Ruskin's reasoning, it is good to send one's mind to school with him. He sets out with a large scheme, as Plato, in the *Republic*, set out to analyse the nature of Justice. We end, perhaps, when we have read the *Republic*, by knowing little more about Justice than when we began. We feel like St. Augustine, who replied to the pert question, "What is Time?"—"I know when you do not ask me." But we have caught glimpses of many beautiful things as we proceed. The force of Ruskin's work lies not in the argument, which is inconclusive enough, but in the shower of stimulating and enlightening things he lets fall by the way. These pages of close reasoning are relieved at intervals by passages of wonderful and luscious beauty, those great musical sentences, so full of colour and movement, so clear and sweet of cadence, which dapple the sun-scorched path as with a burst of shade and bloom. It was this which gave the book its appeal; and Ruskin used to complain that the public loved his pretty sentences and cared nothing for his principles. It was true enough; the

sentences were amazingly beautiful, the principles were dry and inconclusive.

Let me quote one instance, in passing, of the sort of admirable sidelight he throws upon art. He says that the untrained mind is unduly impressed by the first sketch, the beginnings of the picture. That five chalk touches bring a head to life, and that no other five touches in the course of the sketch will ever do so much. But he shows clearly enough that the trained onlooker is not thus misled, and that the true appreciation of art lies in the recognition of the intellectual and technical power that completes and develops the picture.

The first volume of *Modern Painters* was published by the father's advice anonymously—"by a graduate of Oxford." It won an instant recognition. Tennyson, Sydney Smith, Sir Henry Taylor agreed that here was a new spirit and a new voice. The world found out the secret, and laid hands on the author; and Ruskin began to learn the truth of the famous saying which he afterwards uttered, that the artist must fit himself in all ways for the best society, and then must abjure it.

And then there came a sudden revulsion. He

went to the Louvre in 1844, and there suddenly burst upon him the knowledge, which he had never previously suspected, of the greatness of the Venetian school of Italian painters—Titian, Veronese, Bellini. He rushed to Italy in the following year, and began a fierce study of mediæval art; and he did not merely look and observe—he drew, day after day, for eight or nine hours, copying pictures and frescoes. And then all in a moment he saw the Tintorettos at Venice, and the current of his future life was altered: it was an artistic conversion. He realised, in an instant, that the art of the sixteenth century was supremely and undeniably great, when, by all his ingrained religious theories, it ought to have been base and vile. He had been brought up in the straitest evangelicalism, and sincerely believed that any art based upon or springing from Catholic influences must be inherently degraded. It was not the realisation of Italian art generally, but of the art of the Renaissance in particular, which knocked his early theories to pieces. We must not too hastily blame him for rashness and carelessness. Nowadays, with all the photographs and reproductions of great pictures which are accessible to all, it is possible for the most

sedentary person to form some idea of the varied treasures of Italian art. But all this was non-existent then; indeed it is Ruskin's influence that is mainly responsible for the change.

At Venice he took a fever, and a time of horrible depression followed. And now for the first time in his life he says he had the experience of intense and agonised prayer to God, a prayer which was instantly answered. But this sense of a direct relation with God did not last, and he drifted away into the "darkness of the Underworld."

It must be remembered, as I have said, that he had been brought up in the severest evangelicalism. He had been continually finding out the limitations and inconsistencies, and even errors, of the old grim creed; and now he wrote pathetically: "It seemed to me quite sure since my downfall of heart . . . that I had no part nor lot in the privileges of the saints; but, on the contrary, had such share only in the things of God as well-conducted beasts and serenely minded birds had."

And then he plunged into the second volume of *Modern Painters*, which he said was written "at the moulting-time" of his life, and drew out

the theory of beauty. But it was characteristic of Ruskin that though the revelation of Italian art had knocked his former theory to bits, he never thought of abjuring it, or of reconstructing a new theory. He only attempted to fit in to the old scheme the new principles, with what confusion of thought may be seen in that second volume. The book is not easy reading; it is closely and rigidly argued, with some mistakes in fact, but with a marvellous copiousness of illustration. He was trying, on the Aristotelian method, in the manner of Locke, and in the style of Hooker, to argue principles out of facts. His aim was to present a theory of Beauty —perhaps the most difficult thing in the world, because it is so impossible to see into other people's minds in such a matter, or to know what they admire and why they admire it. The perception of beauty is all such a subjective thing, and so bound up with traditions and associations, that it is next to impossible to generalise at all about it, because half one's facts must be drawn from one's own experience; and who can say what inheritance of use and circumstance may not dictate the limits of our own taste and distaste? Take for a simple instance the ideals of

Japanese art. In the case of details like flowers or leaves, insects or birds, it is obvious that a Japanese artist is trying to draw what he sees, and to catch what he thinks beautiful in them. But Japanese artists have inherited a tradition of representation which makes one wonder if indeed they see at all what we see. The flatness of the whole design, the lack of depth and perspective and shadow, compel us to recognise that they are on the look-out for a set of qualities that we do not see, and unconsciously neglecting a whole set of qualities, on which to our own mind the whole lifelikeness of a picture depends. The only evidence which we can quote in our own favour, is that a photograph seems nearer to an English picture than it is to a Japanese. The great bare streaks and patches of a Japanese picture, which make the whole look like a mosaic of suspended vignettes—the treatment of water, with indigo streaks and spongy crumpled foam, with no indication of motion or depth or continuity; these things make us see that there are different conventions in the art of different nations, and that we expect in a picture, not what we see in nature, but what we have learnt to expect on a canvas. But Ruskin was not daunted

by such considerations; he had observed so much, drawn it so faithfully and loved it so intensely, that he was quite ready to evolve a theory of beauty out of his own consciousness. And thus the book is not really a philosophical treatise, but a close analysis of his own sensations, the whole written with a vehemence and an intellectual passion that make it at all events an extremely suggestive document. The theory is all dominated by Ruskin's hitherto unshaken religious sense. He accounts for our sense of beauty by referring it to the attributes of God. Ruskin knew far more about God in those days than he dared to know later; and the treatise really puts art on a moral basis, by referring it to the "heavenward duty" of mankind. But Ruskin hated metaphysics—he had been saved by Dr. Johnson, he once said, from being caught in the cobwebs of German metaphysics, or sloughed in the English drainage of Theism. And thus he swept speculation aside, and laid down the principle that beauty is the bread of the soul, and that we must advance, as we live on, from what is brilliant to what is pure. And so he was led to the conclusion that a false-hearted and impious man could not be a great imaginative painter. This

judgment must be here quoted, because of all Ruskin's deliberate judgments it is perhaps one that has done him most harm as an æsthetic philosopher, since it is a judgment that is directly opposed to facts; and it is opposed to facts, because it takes no account whatever of the strange admixture of good and evil in so many lives, and most of all in the lives of artists. A man may see what is glorious and pure, and represent it, if he has skill of hand and eye; but he may also see what is beautiful without being pure, and be sorrowfully enslaved by it: and perhaps some of the finest of all art is borne out of that very struggle. What would Ruskin have made, if he had known it, of the strange grossness and coarseness of fibre that lay beneath the life of his beloved Turner? When he did learn it, later on, he found himself unable to write the life of the artist, as he had planned to do. Of course neither lofty imagination nor technical skill—which demands for its continuous strength and clearness the simplicity of the ascetic and the training of an athlete—can be expected from a man hopelessly abandoned to sensuality. To achieve mastery, whether of thought or art, a man must be self-restrained and temperate. We have

a way of limiting our use of the word sin to sins of the body; but sins of the mind and heart we class with political crime as hardly discreditable misdemeanours. And indeed the gloomy pride of Michelangelo, the acrid irritability of Beethoven, did not mar the spirituality of their art.

5

Ten years were to pass before the volumes III. and IV. of *Modern Painters* were to see the light; and they were the years of Ruskin's life of which we know the least. The family had moved to a larger house on Denmark Hill, a big villa, with seven acres of garden and paddock, with glass-houses and stables, fowl-houses and piggeries, where the pigs "spoke excellent Irish"; but all this was the natural enough consequence of growing wealth—for old Mr. Ruskin was now becoming a very rich man. Yet the change gave but little proportionate pleasure to any of the three that had come from the simpler delights of Herne Hill. Ruskin himself passed through a time of much despondency. And one unhappy episode cannot be wholly passed over, though he never said a word of it himself in

his own autobiography. He married in 1848, half thoughtlessly, half wilfully, the daughter of old family friends, a girl, Euphemia Gray, for whom some years before he had written his charming allegory, *The King of the Golden River*. It was a marriage only in name. There was little in common between the pair, Mrs. Ruskin's interests being mainly social and personal.

They settled in London, and Ruskin wrote the *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, which may be held to have had a stronger practical effect on English architectural art than any other of his writings: it shook conventional ideas rudely and roughly about. The Seven Lamps, which he confessed he had great difficulty in not making into eight or nine, are seven great moral qualities —Truth, Beauty, Power, Sacrifice, Obedience, Labour, and Memory. The one cardinal principle was that buildings ought to look what they are, and to serve their purpose; that it is an architect's business to decorate construction and not to construct decoration. These and other like principles have become so much a matter of course, that one is apt to forget how novel and how precise they were at the time,

and from what unmeaning muddle of false ideas they rescued us. The art which Ruskin selected to praise as innately beautiful was the art of Italian fourteenth-century Gothic. I believe myself that it will be seen some day that the book, by its force and vehemence, caused an artificial interruption or suspension of the development of our native architecture. The novels of Walter Scott and the Oxford Movement had cut sharply across the classical ideals so nobly initiated by Wren, but which in the distracted apathy of the eighteenth century—its greedy materialism, its ugly indifference to the arts of peace—had become every year more tame and dull. But it was an interruption for all that, and the mid-Victorian Gothic is a very shallow ripple on the tide of art. We seem to be feeling our way at present, through great restlessness and wilfulness, to a style of which classical art is the ground-work. This might have been done earlier, but for Ruskin and Pugin; but English architecture was indeed a valley of dry bones, which needed a shaking and a sorting before they could stand upon their feet.

I will here quote a description of the life lived at Denmark Hill, written by a strange pietistic

artist called James Smetham, who never fulfilled the promise of his youth.

"'I walked there,' writes Smetham, 'through the wintry weather, and got in about dusk. One or two gossiping details will interest you before I give you what I care for; and so I will tell you that he has a large house with a lodge, and a valet and footman and coachman, and grand rooms glittering with pictures, chiefly Turner's, and that his father and mother live with him, or he with them. His father is a fine old gentleman, who has a lot of bushy grey hair, and eyebrows sticking up all rough and knowing, with a comfortable way of coming up to you with his hands in his pockets, and making *you* comfortable, and saying, in answer to your remark, that "John's" prose works are pretty good. His mother is a ruddy, dignified, richly-dressed old gentlewoman of seventy-five, who knows Chamonix better than Camberwell; evidently a *good* old lady, with the *Christian Treasury* tossing about on the table. She puts "John" down, and holds her own opinions, and flatly contradicts him; and he receives all her opinions with a soft reverence and gentleness that is pleasant to witness.

"'I wish I could reproduce a good impression of "John" for you, to give you the notion of his "perfect gentleness and lowlihood." He certainly bursts out with a remark, and in a contradictious way, but only because he believes it, with no air of dogmatism or conceit. He is different at

home from that which he is in a lecture before a mixed audience, and there is a spiritual sweetness in the half-timid expression of his eyes; and in bowing to you, as in taking wine, with (if I heard aright) "I drink to thee," he had a look that has followed me, a look bordering on tearful.

"'He spent some time in this way. Unhanging a Turner from the wall of a distant room, he brought it to the table and put it in my hands; then we talked; then he went up into his study to fetch down some illustrative print or drawing: in one case, a literal view which he had travelled fifty miles to make, in order to compare with the picture. And so he kept on gliding all over the house, hanging and unhanging, and stopping a few minutes to talk.'"

But in the life of Ruskin a catastrophe was close at hand. He himself was bored and tired by society, and his young wife was absorbed in it. In 1853 the pair went to Scotland, Millais came to stay with them and painted their portraits. The face of Euphemia Ruskin may be seen to this day in the beautiful and tender picture, the Order of Release, where the young barefooted Scotch Bride, with a tranquil pride, presents the document for the freedom of her husband to the kindly gaoler. Not long after Mrs. Ruskin left her home and returned to her parents. A suit for nullity was brought against her husband, and was

not defended; and she shortly afterwards married Millais. The first marriage had been a mistake from beginning to end, and was best annulled. Ruskin returned to his own family circle, and devoted himself to his work with ever-increasing tenacity and perseverance.

It was during his married life that he made his studies for *The Stones of Venice*, six hundred quarto pages of notes, as he tells us; and the book was finished in 1852. It was nobly illustrated too, with engravings done under his close superintendence from his own drawings.

The theory of the book was to teach the laws of constructive art, and the dependence of all human work or edifice on the happy life of the workman. Here is struck the first note of his later theories of social reform. The strange thing is that Ruskin ran his theory violently against all facts. The Parthenon, The Pantheon, St. Sophia's, St. Paul's, which will be admitted to be four of the finest buildings in the world, all sprang from periods conspicuous for moral and social corruption, and what is more, from periods when the workman was mercilessly sweated and mechanically coerced; they are in fact the product of the rankest and most violent individualism.

But here again, though the root idea was a false one, the book is splendidly suggestive and urgently inspiring. William Morris summed up the teaching of the book so forcibly and enthusiastically, that I will quote his judgment here. He wrote:—

"The lesson which Ruskin here teaches us is that art is the expression of man's pleasure in labour; that it is possible for man to rejoice in his work, for, strange as it may seem to us to-day, there have been times when he did rejoice in it; and lastly, that unless man's work once again becomes a pleasure to him, the token of which change will be that beauty is once again a natural and necessary accompaniment of productive labour, all but the worthless must toil in pain, and therefore live in pain . . . if this be true . . . it follows that the hallowing of labour by art is the one aim for us at the present day. If politics are to be anything else than an empty game, more exciting but less innocent than those which are confessedly games of skill or chance, it is towards this goal of the happiness of labour that they must make."

But the strange thing is that at the very time when Ruskin was preaching that justice, mercy, and pure religion are the soil in which great art flourishes, that "fidelity to the legible laws of an undoubted God" was the mainspring of art, his

old rigid Calvinistic creed was collapsing. He knew nothing of history, and still less of ecclesiastical history; nothing at all of sociology. He found himself saying that Catholicism was the most debasing and degrading of all creeds, while he was being forced to uphold the fervour and sincerity of the best Catholic art. But he acted characteristically enough. He saw the truth in a flash. A humbler man might perhaps have set to work to read history and study philosophy; but this Ruskin could not do, and we cannot desire that he should have done so. The evils which he saw and testified against were there; the truths he upheld were there: but he had not the least idea of the marvellous interplay and complexity of social and vital forces; there was no middle ground for him. A quality, an age, a person was to Ruskin entirely and indisputably noble, or hopelessly and irredeemably vile. And so without reflection, but with indignation and vehemence, he started on a crusade against all religious and social and philosophical orthodoxies, and became a sorrowful prophet enough; but his sorrow had a fruitful appeal which his dogmatism had never possessed.

LECTURE II

I

I HAVE now traced the story of the first three decades of Ruskin's life, up to the age of thirty or thereabouts, while he was still an art-critic. I will now attempt to define briefly his relation to the art of his time; and the point I wish to make clear, a point which requires to be firmly stated, is this: Ruskin was never in the technical sense an art-critic at all. He wrote about art, it is true, and he wrote about it with considerable technical knowledge. He was a real artist himself, and he thus had a considerable practical knowledge of the aims, the difficulties, the obstacles, the theory and the treatment of art. But to be a comprehensive *critic* of art, and it was this which Ruskin undertook to be, a man must have a comprehensive *view* of art—he must be erudite, he must have a knowledge at once wide and detailed; and this Ruskin did not possess. His acquaintance with pictorial art was partial and limited. He

came to the task with furious preferences and almost fanatical prepossessions. He knew something about the two great English schools of art—portraiture and landscape. He knew a very little of Italian art, but, as I have shown, there were whole schools, such as the Venetian and the Florentine schools which, when he began his work, were as sealed books to him. He was intolerant of Dutch art, and of French and Spanish schools he knew nothing whatever. He did not exactly claim omniscience, but he claimed an absolute certainty and a rightness of judgment which nothing but omniscience could have justified him in claiming.

But as I say, he was not really criticising and comparing and analysing art at all. The pictures he knew were but as glowing brands which kindled his emotion and his mind. His real concern was the philosophy of art, or rather the ethics of art. Moral ideas were what he was in search of all along. It may be said roughly that all idealists are really in search of one and the same thing, though they call it by different names. They are all in search of a certain transforming and uplifting power, something which may stand up "above the howling senses' ebb and flow," some force

which may bring mankind tranquillity and inner happiness—not a listless and indolent happiness, but the happiness which comes of having an aim and a goal, a cause to fight for, a secret to interpret, a message to announce, a dream which is to be brighter and purer than material dreams, a vision which is to outlast life and to help on the regeneration of the world.

He wrote long after of his own qualifications as a critic of art:—

"If I have powers fitted for this task (and I should not have attempted it but in conviction that I have), they are owing mainly to this one condition of my life, that, from my youth up, I have been seeking the fame and honouring the work of others—never my own. I first was driven into literature that I might defend the fame of Turner; since that day I have been explaining the power, or proclaiming the praise, of Tintoret — of Luini — of Carpaccio — of Botticelli — of Carlyle; never thinking for an instant of myself; and sacrificing what little faculty and large pleasure I had in painting either from nature or noble art, that, if possible, I might bring others to see what I rejoiced in, and understand what I had deciphered. There has been no heroism in this, nor virtue—but only, as far as I am myself concerned, quaint ordering of Fate; but the result is, that I *have* at last obtained an instinct of impartial and reverent

judgment, which sternly fits me for this final work, to which, if to anything, I was appointed."

Ruskin then believed the secret of life as well as of art to lie in a sort of heavenly obedience, a triumphant energy, a fiery contemplation. The reason why he clothed his message at first in terms of art is a mere question of faculty. To Ruskin the purest delight of which his spirit was capable came through the eye, through the mysteries of light and colour, of form and curve—the devices which make such a man say in a rapture of spiritual satisfaction, "Yes, it is like that!" He had both the eye for effect and the eye for detail, sight at once extended and microscopical. He wrote of himself, "I had a sensual faculty of pleasure in *sight*, as far as I know unparalleled."

But if he had been a musician he would have attacked the problem in precisely the same way, only with a different terminology. We may be sure that in music he would have had some three or four supreme favourites; he would have swept the rest aside with one impartial gesture. He would have asserted with impassioned rhetoric that the inspiring musician was also the virtuous man. If the facts had been against him, he would have maintained that the great musician, though disfigured

by glaring faults, had still some inner righteousness of soul, while he would have blackened the record of musicians whose music he believed to be on the wrong lines!

It was noble and enthusiastic theorising, most of it, and no deficiency of knowledge can detract from the inspiration of it. It could and it did kindle the seed of flame in many a generous mind; but it was not art criticism. No one can be a critic who is deeply and obviously biassed, who is from first to last a partisan. He may, it is true, reveal the special merit of the artists whom he admires, but he cannot arrive patiently at the principles of art, because he cannot really compare artists; he can only eulogise or vilify. Ruskin was never just. But that mattered little, because justice is required of the philosopher or the statesman, not of the poet and the prophet. And thus it is impossible to make a greater mistake than to consider Ruskin to have been a critic of art: he was a prophet of art, a rhetorician, a moralist, but he was not a judge nor an arbiter, and still less a historian of art.

In those first fifteen years, while his joy was mainly in art, and while he wished to share his joy with others, he preached from that one text.

His disillusionment came not with art but with humanity. When he found that the ordinary man did not care for art, and could neither be inspired nor scolded into regarding it seriously, he plunged into the study of the causes which made men so indifferent, so brutal, so materialistic: that was the period of his political economy and of his social studies.

And then when he was headed off again, and found again that he could not reform or regenerate the world in the twinkling of an eye, that men would not—he never perceived that they could not—see what was to himself so evident, so glorious, so divine, then he surrendered himself to a sort of despair; and even that was beautiful, because he never lost his gracious tenderness, his delicate irony of utterance.

We must then keep this in mind—that art criticism was to Ruskin not more than the habit and vesture of the priest, but that all the time his hand was raised to consecrate and to bless, and his heart was set upon the divine mystery, of which the bread on the gleaming dish and the wine in the jewelled chalice were but the fair and seemly symbols.

2

There is a theory of art which is sedulously put forward nowadays and passionately defended—that art alone, of all the provinces of human activity, must exist for its own sake. The theory is that it is the expression that matters, that it need not even be beauty of which the artist is in search: that he must observe, must keep his eye on the object, and make a sincere and perfect presentment of it, whatever the object may be—a mental conception, an intellectual idea, a landscape, a face, and so on down to things mean and pitiful and grotesque.

The theory is to me so meaningless from the outset that I cannot perhaps do justice to it. It may be true of exact sciences like mathematics, philosophy, history, where the thing aimed at is the disentangling of some definite truth, some equation of values—which is an altogether intellectual process. But when the process is an emotional one, the theory appears to me to have no meaning. You cannot so restrict and confine vital processes. Of course art is vitiated, as everything else is vitiated, if you are not really pursuing it at all, but something else. If you write a novel,

the purport of which is not to present a story, but to further the cause of Foreign Missions, the art of your writing will be hurt exactly in so far as you allow your ultimate aim to modify the truth and vitality of your picture. Art is partly a question of method and form, partly of subject and impulse. Anything which awes or interests or charms or amuses the human mind is fit to be treated of by art: religion, morals, sociology, science—all alike can be treated artistically. I will go further, and say that most of the best literary art of the nineteenth century in England consists in the treatment of moral ideas—Wordsworth, Browning, Tennyson, Carlyle, Ruskin, all were moralists. In fact Ruskin by himself seems to me, once and for all, to dispose of the theory of art for art's sake. He began by treating mainly of art, and while he did so, his handling of it was artistic enough; but when moral ideas took possession of and dominated his mind, so far from his art being vitiated by the inrush of this stronger tide, it grew in delicacy and perfection every year; and what is yet more surprising, when he took to writing *Fors Clavigera*, and threw overboard all consideration of form, the thing became more beautiful still; so that he reached

the perfection of his art by preoccupation with moral ideas, and deliberate neglect of form. That is the worst, and in another way the best, of these dominant geniuses, that they knock to bits all pedantic theories of art, and force dogmatists to reconstruct their principles. And thus they tend to show that art is really a question of inspiration and instinct, and not a question of rules and precedents. The vital thing is to have something to say, and the next thing is to be able to say it cogently, persuasively, clearly and beautifully: and in Ruskin's case, as in the case of others, the art of expression gained, the less he studied it. Of course his practice told, but what really gave his words force and charm was the intense desire to convince and to persuade that lay behind it all.

The opposite result is well illustrated by the case of Tennyson. When in early days Tennyson said what was in his mind, as sincerely and as beautifully as possible, his art was at its strongest, but when he began to try to express what he did not really care about, but what he thought would be approved of by the public—what was expected of him, what he ought to care about—he became popular and inartistic. Now Ruskin became popular

in spite of himself. He thought that the aims, the hopes, the pleasures, the ideals of the world in which he lived, were not only low but becoming lower. He protested, he vituperated, he broke out into irony and expostulation; where he went wrong was when he dogmatised about the limits of what was beautiful and desirable; when he scolded people for caring about the art for which he himself did not happen to care, or held up as models of unimpeachable beauty the slight and trivial books and pictures in which he detected a congenial motive. But his influence was due partly to the fact that he did care vehemently and passionately for certain forms of expression and certain ideals of life, and partly too to the fact that he could invest what he said with the indescribable quality called charm, which has as yet escaped the severest critical analysis.

But the mistake which men make who uphold art for art's sake, is the mistake which is made by those who think that good manners can be cultivated apart from the unselfishness and the sympathy of which they are the natural expression, or by the ecclesiastical persons who believe that religion is wholly bound up with ceremonies. Art is nothing but the love of beauty finding

utterance. Like water, it will flow in natural channels; its rules are not arbitrary regulations, but the self-created forms of its own secret laws; and to confine it under the sway of precedents, is as though a botanist were to condemn an unknown flower because it violated the principles deduced from the flowers he knows. The only fruitful kind of criticism is that which recognises and welcomes a new force in art, a new form of expression, not the criticism which lays down a precise and inelastic code. In all provinces of life which deal with vital and progressive emotions, the only people who are certainly wrong are the orthodox, because the orthodox are those who think that development has ceased, and that the results can be tabulated. And thus they resent any further development, because it interferes with their conclusions, and gives them a sense of insecurity and untidiness, and the upsetting of agreeable arrangements. In his artistic criticism Ruskin began by being unorthodox, and in breaking, like Mahomet, the idols of the land. But he ended by creating his own orthodoxy, and arriving at a sort of Papal infallibility, which was perfectly rigid and entirely impenetrable. Yet he never made the mistake

of regarding art as an end in itself. As his outlook widened, he began to regard the due acceptance of his own preferences in art as a sign and symptom of moral healthiness, and any deviation from that loyalty seemed to him an offence not against taste but against morals. In his views upon art and life he was really intensely denominational. He was the master of a sheepfold, and all outside were thieves and robbers. He required absolute obedience, but he had not that note of personal dominance which distinguishes the founder of a school. The real way to read and to follow Ruskin is to share his generous enthusiasms, and frankly to disregard his personal dictation. He is a great guide but an unsafe ruler. One may thankfully start on pilgrimage with him, but one must be prepared to part company with him where the roads divide over the hill.

3

And now there followed a very full and vigorous period of ten years, from 1851 to 1860. Ruskin began his crusade with a curious little volume: *Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds.* It is said that a good many copies of this pamphlet

were bought by Yorkshire and Cumberland farmers, under the impression that it was an essay in technical agriculture, and that they were vexed to find it an appeal for Christian unity. It was a plea to Anglicanism to abandon Catholic pretensions, and to Presbyterianism to adopt Episcopalianism. Of course most religious men have been appalled, at one time or another, to find Christians more divided from each other than from the heathen by intense conviction and violent indignation over points the significance of which would be almost unintelligible, by reason of their similarity, to a convinced Buddhist. Of course compromise seems easy and reasonable enough, but reason is a very secondary force compared with consistency and tradition. And Ruskin was distressed to find how firmly the adders of artistic orthodoxy stopped their ears against the voice of the wisest of charmers.

In these years he went much into society and made many of his best friendships. He took up the cause of the Pre-Raphaelites, Rossetti, Holman Hunt, Burne-Jones and Millais, and invested that singular revolt with an interest which it has never lost. Ruskin's relations with Rossetti are extremely interesting, for this reason. Rossetti

was certainly one of the strongest personalities in the region of art that the last century produced. He was an absolute pagan, and an almost inconceivable individualist. He took not the slightest interest in history or philosophy or movements of any kind. He once divided the human race into two classes: artists, and the people whose duty it was to admire art and to pay for its production. But he had a magnetic force and a royal generosity of spirit, that made him one of the most dominant personalities of the world of art. The acquaintance began with sympathy and deference. Ruskin exhorted Rossetti to work, bought his pictures, petted him, lectured him, criticised him. But it was an impossible alliance. Rossetti was indifferent to the claims of morality, and inflamed by the holy fire of art. The inevitable rupture followed. Ruskin found himself calmly disregarded, and Rossetti went on his own dark way into sorrow and silence. Each descended into hell; but Ruskin's inferno led him out into a clearer air, while the torture-chamber of Rossetti was the grim *cul-de-sac* from which the soul must somehow or other retrace her burdened steps in anguish. But for a time they worked in concert, till the gulf opened

beneath their feet. Here is one of Ruskin's letters to Rossetti, which gives so curious an account of his own disposition, as it appeared to himself, and in so intimate a strain, that it is worth considering:—

"You constantly hear a great many people saying I am very bad, and perhaps you have been yourself disposed lately to think me very good—I am neither the one nor the other. I am very self-indulgent, very proud, very obstinate, and *very* resentful; on the other side, I am very upright—nearly as just as I suppose it is possible for man to be in this world—exceedingly fond of making people happy, and devotedly reverent to all true mental or moral power. I never betrayed a trust—never wilfully did an unkind thing—and never, in little or large matters, depreciated another that I might raise myself. I believe I once had affections as warm as most people; but partly from evil chance, and partly from foolish misplacing of them, they have got tumbled down and broken to pieces. . . . I have no friendships and no loves. . . . My pleasures are in seeing, thinking, reading, and making people happy (if I can consistently with my own comfort). And I *take* these pleasures."

And at this time too began for Ruskin the career as a lecturer, which was perhaps to bring him closer to the hearts of men even than his

great books. It is characteristic to note the view which the secluded household at Denmark Hill took of the occupation. His father sorrowfully permitted the venture—the son invariably had his own way—but said that it was degrading for a man to expose himself to journalistic comment and personal references. The mother, more lost in privacy, said grimly that he was too young, though he was a married man of thirty-four. "I cannot reconcile myself," she wrote, "to the thought of your bringing yourself personally before the world till you are somewhat older and stronger."

In 1853 Ruskin was at work writing notes for the Arundel Society on Giotto's frescoes at Padua. This little book, since reprinted, has a special charm, because Giotto was one of Ruskin's particular heroes. He constantly returns to Giotto, and Giotto is one of the few artists whom he criticised, against whom he was never betrayed into saying a single disparaging word. It was to him that Ruskin traced the guiding and originating principle of Florentine art. Giotto's life was romantic, even legendary, but there is something of the inner spirit of beauty in all that came from his hand. Moreover there is a

strong and impressive intellectual quality in all that he did—the same sort of quality which comes out in Lionardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. One feels in all Giotto's work the pressure of a vigorous mind, the presence of the fundamental brain-work, which Rossetti held to be the essence of the finest art; he never falls into sentimentality or into monotony. There is something fresh and unexhausted about him, both in his choice of subjects, his handling of detail, and his power of contrast. All this was deeply congenial to Ruskin; and must not forget this episode of his life, because here his power of detecting serene greatness in art, and presenting it faithfully and impartially, without bitterness and undue depreciation, comes out most strongly.

At this time too, in 1854, was inaugurated the Working Men's College, the theory of which was to bring the serener sort of academic culture within reach of working men. But this was all part of the great Chartist movement, which Charles Kingsley, F. D. Maurice, Tom Hughes, and Carlyle did so much to welcome, and to guide into peaceful channels. Ruskin joined the Pre-Raphaelites in the inception of the idea; he subscribed largely, he lectured, he taught drawing, and for

four years he was perhaps the chief inspiring force of the College. His reasons for severing his connection with the work were given some years later in a letter to Maurice.

"It is not," he wrote, "from any failure in my interest in this class that I have ceased from personal attendance. But I ascertained beyond all question that the faculty which my own method of teaching chiefly regarded, was necessarily absent in men trained to mechanical toil, that my words and thoughts respecting beautiful things were unintelligible when the eye had been accustomed to the frightfulness of modern city life."

The episode is interesting, as denoting his change of front and his broadening of horizon. Till now he had been rather a brilliant individualist than anything else. But he began to turn in the direction of social reform; he began to see that the hope of the future lay in the education of the democracy. The problem of the divergence of class interests and class feelings began to concern him; and he saw that what was needed was that the wealthier class, who had hitherto possessed a sort of monopoly of culture, should come forward personally, and give freely whatever of taste and beauty and inspiring motive they possessed; not in a condescend-

ing and patronising spirit, doling out attractive selections of cheap culture, but sharing generously and freely the good things which society had hitherto conspired to secure only to the rich and leisured classes. Ruskin began to perceive that the fortune which his father secured him was in the main neither more nor less than a subscription levied from the labours of those through whose uncheered toil the fortune was made.

F. D. Maurice, for all his deep conscientiousness and generosity of purpose, was not an ideal head for such a movement; he was an essentially puzzle-headed man. Ruskin said of him that he reconciled Biblical difficulties by turning them upside down, like railway cushions. He arrived at orthodoxy, not by the direct road, but by labyrinthine paradoxes. On one occasion Maurice, who was a strict Sabbatarian, was asked what he felt about the opening of museums on Sunday. It was thought that he was cornered for once, and would have to give a plain answer. But Maurice was equal to the dilemma. He said that museums should certainly be opened on Sundays, but he trusted that working men would have too much respect for the Sabbath to think of frequenting them!

All this time Ruskin was throwing off books with marvellous celerity. Indeed the incredible amount of finished literary work, which he combined with indefatigable drawing, mineralogical study, teaching, and lecturing, shows the wonderful vitality which was half the secret of his force. He recuperated from one sort of toil by another: and I would not have you overlook the gigantic industry of the man! His work seems and was so facile, that one is apt to forget in what urgency of stress it was done.

The Elements of Drawing—a masterpiece of clear statement and logical expression—belongs to this date; and also *The Harbours of England*, which is a patriotic prose poem of the loftiest and most resounding eloquence. He began, too, his annual Notes on the Academy Exhibition, and he was hard at work arranging and selecting the mass of Turner's studies and drawings which had been left to the nation. There were nearly 20,000 of these, rolled up into great cylinders, rammed into drawers, stuffed into bulging portfolios, many of them drawn on both sides of the paper; and the whole damp, dusty, and neglected. All the time, too, he was at work on the last volume of

Modern Painters, of which the final fifth volume appeared in 1860.

The work of one of these years is well summarised in a letter written to Mrs. Carlyle in the autumn of 1855, which conveys a singularly vivid picture of the restless brain with all its schemes and ideas.

He begins by saying that he has written some six hundred pages since the spring, and that he has great hopes of disturbing the public peace in various directions by what he has to suggest. He has also prepared, he says, thirty drawings for the engravers, some of which he has himself etched, and all of which he has retouched. He has been reading up various subjects, such as German Metaphysics, Political Economy, Cookery, Music, Geology, Dress, Horticulture, and Education. He has been sketching in the open air, designing a window, learning Spanish. He has drawn up a new system of Botany, on his own lines, and re-arranged his collection of Minerals. But perhaps the main interest of the letter is his confession that he has discovered that all previous theories of Political Economy are wrong, and that he is engaged in an independent investigation of the nature of Wealth.

The letter shows clearly enough the drift of Ruskin's mind in the direction of social pro-

blems; but it is mainly interesting as illustrating the perilous activity of his brain. No doubt the fact that he varied his studies, and interspersed a good deal of mechanical handiwork, relieved the strain to a certain extent; but it is a revelation of great restlessness, and of a furious appetite for mental occupation, which presages disaster.

Of course there are plenty of people in the world who work hard, and work continuously; mechanical labour, either of brain or hand, undoubtedly makes for health and sanity; but the danger with Ruskin was the emotional strain involved. He could not keep his thoughts to himself, and be content to accumulate his studies quietly and stolidly. He was forced to share his opinions, and to confute received theories; and it was here that the difficulty lay. He was always occupied in a sort of mental strategy, conducting a campaign against complacent orthodoxy. His persuasive charm carried his own circle to a great extent along with him; but he formed his own theories hastily, and expressed them strongly; and though it is perhaps safe to say that all stereotyped opinion is erroneous, because it is essential to the life of ideas that they should grow and develop, yet the expansion of thought needs a combination of patience and

exactness, which Ruskin seldom attained; and the battle, in a sense, cost him his life.

4

And here I may say a few words about the later volumes of *Modern Painters*. They did little more than expand and reiterate the principles originally laid down. The third volume is really a collection of scattered essays on art. It begins with an essay on the Grand style, or Dignity in art, in which, with infinite variety of illustration, the somewhat indisputable proposition is stated that you can tell greatness of style by the greatness of an artist; and if you want to go further and detect the greatness of an artist, the only way to arrive at it is through the greatness of his style. There is a delightful chapter on the Grotesque in Art, and a famous chapter on the Pathetic Fallacy, the point being that we are apt to put human emotion behind natural forces—to think of the storm as angry, of the sea as cruel, of the sunlight as beneficent, and of the pestilence as malignant. Whereas the truth is that even the pestilence has no malicious intent. It is merely so many colonies of vigorous bacteria hard at work enjoying themselves in congenial circumstances. The result is the decimation

of human society, and the discomfort of many individuals ; but the bacteria in question are thinking, if they reflect at all, about their own eugenics and their own social development, and not the least about the bereavements they unintentionally cause. There is too a good deal of dogmatism about poetry, which is little more than a justification of Ruskin's own preferences, and show that he had but an imperfect appreciation of his subject ; and there is much beautiful writing about the spirit of domestic landscape, tamed woodland and tilled field, and a wild plea to the nation not to annihilate time and space by steam.

And here I would draw attention to a particular limitation of Ruskin's, because it is strongly characteristic of him. He spent himself at intervals in frantic objurgations of steam as abbreviating leisurely travel, and as nullifying dignified and tranquil manual labour. The fact is that here came out both his bourgeois tradition and his innate Toryism. The post-chaise and the travelling carriage represented to Ruskin the height of locomotive convenience ; but it is impossible to resist the conviction, that had he lived before horses had been used for purposes of locomotion, he would have passionately resisted their introduction, as interfering with the natural dignity and

appropriateness of pedestrianism. Similarly had he been brought up to gain his early experiences of travel by railways, he would have copiously praised railway travelling as the natural and seemly method of voyaging, and would have spent himself in bitter diatribes against the impiety and horror of aerial navigation.

So too with his hatred of steam as a mechanical force. He praised the human use of wind and water; he wanted to do the work of the world by tide-mills; the waterwheel and the windmill seemed to him to be comely and homely additions to the landscape. But it is wholly unreasonable to dictate at what point human invention is to cease. The telephone is not more morally hateful and repugnant to the sense of dignity than the penny post; and to be consistent, Ruskin should have insisted upon the disuse of all mechanical contrivances for shortening labour; he should have implored men to bite and tear cloth instead of using scissors, and to till the earth with their hands instead of using spade and plough. He did not see that the one chance of giving men leisure in an over-populated community is to save mechanical and disheartening labour by every possible means; and instead of raving against manufacturers for filling the air with

sulphurous fumes and the earth with cinderheaps, he should have had the faith to see that all the turning of the forces of the earth to serve human life and security is a step in the direction of giving men time to cultivate higher pleasures and to follow finer pursuits. It is here that a certain childish petulance, amusing enough if it were not also so irritating, comes out in the man.

The fourth volume of *Modern Painters* carries on the thought of the pictorial vision, of the right use of Mystery. Here Ruskin's love of strong paradox emerges; together with his insistence on exactness of detail, comes such a statement as this: "All distinct drawing must be bad drawing, and . . . nothing can be right till it is unintelligible." "Excellence of the highest kind, without obscurity, cannot exist"; but this is qualified by the celebrated phrase, "the right of being obscure is not one to be lightly claimed." It may be asked what coherent theory of art can be deduced from these contradictions? The answer is that they are all true statements; and the mistake lay not in the statements, but in the fact that Ruskin began by dogmatising, and that his view of the possibilities of art widened, through simple experience, as he wrote. A less positive man, a man less determined to teach and to uphold a theory, might have aban-

doned the task in despair, on finding that a larger experience of art made havoc of earlier theories. But Ruskin did not do this; he merely enunciated his later discoveries just as decisively as he had announced his previous discoveries, heedless, and rightly heedless, that the new patch tore the old garment to tatters. But the new dicta enlarged the old. What broke in pieces was the old exclusive theory. But the only people who are the worse for that are those who go to Ruskin for a scientific statement of the ultimate principles of art. His statement is throughout poetical and rhetorical, suggestive rather than exhaustive; and while Ruskin did not attain at any explanation or synthesis of art, he did contrive to present a splendid analysis of it, and disentangled much that was profoundly interesting and true about the motives of art and its sources of inspiration.

The rest of the volume is mostly taken up with the subject of Mountains in art, and is a direct study of nature; and here again he tried to probe too deeply, and attempted to attribute to the effects of natural scenery the dispositions and emotions of those who inhabit mountainous country, the causes of which lie far deeper than the mere slope of ledge and ridge, the sweep of mist and the noise of falling streams.

The fifth volume is a further study of landscape, treating of tree and leaf, of cloud and sea, and ends with a fine summary of the aims and executions of great landscape schools; and here we may note the singular and almost pettish exclusion of the noble school of modern French landscape painters, such as Corot and Millet, which he names with bated breath, and with a sort of shuddering horror. The cause, we may safely affirm, that he knew nothing of these painters, and had not studied them. The book returns to a great panegyric upon Turner, and a burst of passionate grief that he was so little appreciated and understood in his lifetime.

And so the great book draws to an end; and surveying it all as we can do, after an interval of fifty years, we can see that, though it fails in its argument, though its effect upon art was in a way misleading, because it only substituted one convention for another, and overbore a serene adopted tradition of admiration for certain received forms of art by a passionate individual preference, yet it did something which it never set out to do. Only recently has art recovered from the despotism of Ruskin; it has learnt that he was right, but not exclusively right. We have come to see that art must find its own path, and cannot run meekly in prescribed channels; and we have learnt too, that

the victory lies with those who can see for themselves, and admire and love, rather than with those who can repeat the dicta of critics, and belittle and despise.

But it has done far more than that. It has put art in quite a different position, not as the indolent privilege of a few but as the stirring inheritance of many; and it has shown too that art, as well as morality and religion, is one of the many stairways that lead men out of the pit of materialism to the higher and purer glories of mind and spirit; that life must be a choice and a battle; and that the spiritual nature can only grow by exercise and endeavour; and that an indolent surrender to mere sensuous experience in art is as dangerous to the soul as an unrestrained sensualism to the body.

All this is presented not only with a matchless vigour and courage, but with a style that now thunders like a falling cataract, and now croons as sweetly as a dove hidden among trees; a style that can scathe with fiery invective, and stab with piercing truth, that can rouse as with martial music on a day of battle, and can in a moment be as the thought of one who saunters, full of joy, in a day of early spring, among the daffodils and windflowers of an English copse. And then in a moment comes a touch of exquisite

pathos, or of lambent irony, or of that delicious humour that shows how closely akin laughter is to tears. Nothing is so notable about the book as its swift transitions, which give no sense of an interrupted mood or of an ungoverned vagueness of thought, but which just draw the mind onwards, with a sense of true companionship, so that one shares alike the joy and the sorrow of the writer, and finds both beautiful.

5

Before I leave this period I must mention a letter which Ruskin wrote to Professor Norton from Venice in 1859. It has this special interest—that he was on the verge of a great crisis, and it was almost the last thing he ever wrote in the old self-confident manner. I confess that there is to me in the letter a hint of strain, almost of shrillness, as of one whose nerves are strung too highly; and in the tense and almost exaggerated humour of the whole, there is a touch of what the Scotch call "fey"—a kind of feverish gaiety on the edge of the shadow, presaging calamity.

He describes himself as the victim of all kinds of "provocations"—frostbitten fingers, impatient gondoliers, unpunctual sacristans and servants, bells, wind, rain, tides, and mud. It is clear

that he was working very hard, and always on the edge of great irritability; but the letter is more interesting still for another reason, which I can only explain by a parable.

We must all know—perhaps we realise it more as we grow older—a curious sense, partly amusing and partly pathetic, which arises on seeing a child absolutely intent and absorbed in some self-chosen occupation or game, which may seem to an older person extraordinarily trivial or wearisome, yet which the child pursues day after day with unabated persistence, though it interrupts his relations with others and renders him apparently, for the time being, oblivious of affection and even emotion.

This letter of Ruskin's gives me the same mixed sense of pathos and of amusement. There is at the surface the freakish kind of humour over it all, which shows how easily he could stand outside of himself, and see the absurdity of his pettishness. Then there comes in the pathos of it; and this I think resides in the wonder that he could have thought what he was doing to be really important! Of course one must not in this world throw away lightly treasures of accumulated beauty and tradition, and still less sacrifice it all ruthlessly to brutal indifferences or mere

material conveniences. But to feel about any human handiwork as Ruskin was feeling then is extravagant, and faithless as well. It can only be excused if one really feels that the human race has exhausted its possibilities of beautiful conception and delineation. Perhaps the strongest reason why the artistic expression of our time seems weak and faltering is because we have lost our hearts too much to the ancient beauty of art and song; and despairing of ever regaining that sweet early fragrance, that almost childlike delight of untrammelled utterance, we have lived too much in retrospect, and too little in touch with the marching age.

I do feel that there is something unreal and unbalanced in these half-frienzied laments over what the world takes away, laments not counterbalanced by any apparent belief or hope that life was giving or holding in store anything of beauty that could replace or supersede the old!

And then too there runs through the whole letter the sense that Ruskin is only writing of the outer life after all; that it is more or less make-believe; that he is endeavouring to persuade himself and others that his life is active, enthusiastic, vivid, lived in eager ecstasy with forms and

colours ; while all the while one seems to distinguish beyond and beneath all this laughter and emphatic talk, some dark current of desolate waters, a tide deriving its motion and ebb from forces far removed from earth and things trivial, from the pulse of some vast, cold, gleaming thing moving silently in the abyss, which was bearing away this frail and delicate spirit for all its well-bred excitement and fine enthusiasm on a very different journey and to a voyage of which the end might not be known.

It is the presence of this deep-seated suspicion in Ruskin's mind, hardly even consciously realised, that he had been hitherto pursuing the wrong thoughts and the shallow things which gives, I believe, the curious ring to his letters about this time. One sees him trying to lift, or in some cases to pull down, the curtains of his mind, to enlighten, or to beguile his nearest and dearest friends ; and I will therefore quote two extracts from letters, in his own most intimate and confiding strain, which show what was going on in the innermost stronghold of his mind and heart. Moreover these two letters, written before the great change and crisis of his life, gain much in interest and significance by being written to

the two great poets of the age, Robert Browning and Tennyson.

The first was written in January 1859, and not to Browning only, but to his wife as well.

"I am much helped by all you say in your letters—being apt, in spite of all my certainty of being right in the main, to be seized with great fits of vexation—for the truth is that my own proper business is not that of writing; I am never happy as I write; never want to utter for my own delight, as you singers do (with all your pretences to benevolence and all that, you know you like singing just as well as the nightingales). But I'm truly benevolent, miserably benevolent. For my own pleasure I should be collecting stones and mosses, drying and ticketing them—reading scientific books—walking all day long in the summer—going to plays, and what not, in winter—never writing nor saying a word—rejoicing tranquilly or intensely in pictures, in music, in pleasant faces, in kind friends. But now—about me there is thus terrific absurdity and wrong going on. People kill my Turner with abuse of him—make rifle targets of my Paul Veroneses—make themselves, and me, unendurably wretched by all sorts of ridiculous doings—won't let me be quiet. I live the life of an old lady in a houseful of wicked children—can do nothing but cry out—they won't leave me to my knitting-needles a moment. And this working in a way contrary to one's whole nature tells

upon one at last—people never were meant to do it. They were meant to be able to give quiet pieces of advice to each other, and show, without any advice, how things should be done properly (such as they had gift and liking for). But people were never meant to be always howling and bawling the right road to a generation of drunken cabmen, their heads up through the trapdoor of the hansom, faces all over mud—no right road to be got upon after all—nothing but a drunken effort at turning, ending in ditch. I hope to get just one more howl executed, from which I hope great effects—upon the moon—and then, see if I don't take to kennel and straw, comfortably."

And then there is the letter to Tennyson, who had just sent Ruskin a present of his *Idylls*.

"I am not sure," he says, "but I feel the art and finish in these poems a little more than I like to feel it. . . . As a description of various nobleness and tenderness the book is without price; but I shall always wish it had been nobleness independent of a romantic condition of externals in general.

"*In Memoriam, Maud, The Miller's Daughter*, and such-like will always be my own pet rhymes, but I am quite prepared to admit this to be as good as any, for its own peculiar audience. Treasures of wisdom there are in it, and word-painting such as never was yet for concentration: nevertheless it seems to me that so great power

ought not to be spent on visions of things past, but on the living present. For one hearer capable of feeling the depth of this poem, I believe ten would feel a depth quite as great if the stream flowed through things nearer the hearer. And merely in the facts of modern life—not drawing-room, formal life, but the far-away and quite unknown growth of souls in and through any form of misery or servitude—there is an infinity of what men should be told, and what none but a poet can tell. I cannot but think that the intense, masterful, and unerring transcript of an actuality, and the relation of a story of any real human life, as a poet would watch and analyse it, would make all men feel more or less what poetry was, as they felt what Life and Fate were in their instant workings. . . . The feeling continually weighs upon me, day by day, more and more, that not the grief of the world but the loss of it is the wonder of it. I see creatures so full of all power and beauty, with none to understand or teach or save them. The making in them of miracles, and all cast away, for ever lost, as far as we can trace. And no 'in memoriam.'"

Before I say a word about the thought in these two memorable letters, I would wish you to notice what an example they are of the extraordinary sensitiveness of Ruskin's mind, in the delicate reflection they give, in style and language, of the

persons to whom they were written. It is not fanciful to see in the quick, broken, allusive letter to the Brownings—even in the constant omission of the article, that the very texture of the letter was being coloured, as it was being written, by imaginative sympathy with the method of thought and expression of the recipients. And then in the Tennyson letter, the same effect is observable, in the solemn and stately cadences into which the sentences fall. They are both letters *to* people as well as letters *from* a person.

And then observe how the whole ebb of thought is running, swiftly and surely, away from old beauty and sweet dreams of peace, towards the cataract of modern needs and problems! He is turning his back on the past; he is engrossed in the present. In the Browning letter, indeed, in spite of all its tenderness and humour, there peeps out what I cannot but call the ugly part of Ruskin's mind—the tendency to blame and censure, to feel that every one else is on the wrong tack, and that he himself is divinely appointed to set them right. There is a deep-seated impatience and irritability about it, which I cannot praise. It may be said that the pure-hearted clear-sighted man has a right not to be what is

horribly called mealy-mouthed. But it reminds me, for all that, of the thankless servant in the parable, who had been forgiven a great debt, and went out from his Lord's presence to harry his own humble debtors. It may be, as I have heard it plausibly urged, that the servant was actuated by a severe sense of honesty, and desired to pay back perhaps a halfpenny in the pound. But he had mistaken the meaning of forgiveness for all that!

And thus the letter to Tennyson strikes a humbler and a greater note—the sorrow of the waste of the world, and "the unknown growth of souls in and through any form of misery and servitude." He was close upon the prison-door himself, where he was to learn the sharp lesson of the awfulness of humbled pride; he was to learn that each man's life is a mystery, a secret between himself and God—a secret not to be plumbed by confident eyes, and a mystery not to be made plain by any clearest stream of human eloquence. And here I leave him, at the threshold of the dark doorway.

LECTURE III

I

AND now in Ruskin's fortieth year, when he had lived out half his days, there came the *cardo rerum*, the hinge of destiny, of which the Roman poets speak, and this strange vivid life turned slowly on its pivot. I think that this is the right moment to look backwards and to look forwards. The earlier current of his life may be said to interpret itself, like a bright stream of living water, rippling lightly enough in woodland places, with here and there a fall and a water-break, yet passing easily enough by sunny pools and shining reaches. But now there comes a change, and at first sight a tragic change, so much so, indeed, that it wants a few words of preparation.

Let me look backwards first. And I would say that we cannot make a greater mistake or an easier mistake, in reading the record of a great life, than to credit its earlier moods and passages

with something of the glory and greatness that crowned its close. We think of the earlier days of famous men as in some way gilded and decorated with the trophies of renown, the path made easier to tread, inspirited by approval and applause. The exact reverse is generally the case. Many great men who have died early have never had the consciousness of fame at all. Keats, for instance, was to himself and his friends an indolent and consumptive poetaster, without money or prospects. Shelley was a man banned and branded in respectable society, a byword for fantastic immorality, a crank, and worse than a crank. Ruskin himself, had he died at this date, would have been little more than a very brilliant and rather fantastic art-critic, enabled by his wealth to live an artistic life, and to indulge in heterodox and unusual views, master of a fine eloquent style, and with leisure to evolve an elaborate and rather inconclusive theory of art. He was known too by a few as a man of great social charm, whimsical, humorous and sympathetic. He had fame, of course, of a kind, but not the sort of renown which came to him later. Perhaps a few clear-sighted people saw that there was something nobler and richer behind,

and suspected that he was speaking, under symbols of art, of something larger and more vital than the appreciation of style in architecture and painting. And then if we look at the man himself, there is hitherto something unreasonable, over-vehement, inconsiderate about it all. He had arrived at his conclusions by instinct, and believed that he had attained them by reason. He had been brought up in a narrow and secluded atmosphere; his mother an uncompromising Puritan, his father a man of deferential artistic tastes, with a dim consciousness of thwarted powers, and energies devoted to an unromantic trade, successful enough in a shy sort of way, yet with a dumb resentment against life which he was too proud to admit. Ruskin was hitherto the creature of circumstance. He had been trained as a moralist and as a connoisseur; his eye absorbed in critical observation, his hand versed in delineation, and his mind set upon dominating opinion and regulating morality. He had taken his innate Puritanism into his criticism, and had tried to conform the lawlessness of art to the dictates of Evangelical morality. He had had his troubles, but they had not borne fruit; he had escaped from them into

his own walled and moated paradise; he had lived for himself, though quite willing to help other people, as he confessed, if it did not interfere with his own comfort; and he had displayed a bigoted and self-centred temper. There is little that is wise or noble about the man hitherto. It had been a career of unbroken success of a small and self-centred kind; his genius had showed itself in his incredible laboriousness, and in a vitality of immense elasticity and toughness. But not by these things is the world changed!

And now he was to be given a new heart. He was to see and to feel; he was to be mocked and derided; he was to wrestle with hateful thoughts; he was to torment himself over the evils of society; he was to build up an elaborate scheme for its amelioration. His scheme was to fail, and not even to fail nobly; it was not only to be viewed with indifference, but with open ridicule and contempt. He was at first just kindly silenced, and bidden to concern himself with his art, sent back like a child to its toys; and when he persisted, he was to be called crazy and fantastic. And worse still, he was to bear one of the heaviest trials that can fall to the lot of man; he was to pass into the delirious shadow-world

of insanity, to be mocked by his own visions, in that awful twilight-land in which a man cannot distinguish between truth and hallucination. He was to fix his pure affections with all the fiery intensity of a virginal nature upon a girl far younger than himself, and he was to be rejected on grounds of the narrow Evangelicalism which he had once preached, and of which he had burst the bonds. The sights and sounds of earth, the pageantry of art, in which he had lived so delicately and so strenuously, were to become mere mocking echoes and scornful voices, taunting him with a joy he could no longer feel; and he was to struggle on, with the tempest beating over him in crash after crash, until his own sweet utterance was quenched, and he was forced into silence and inaction. He was to fade into imbecility and invalidism, petted and soothed tenderly enough, but with the thwarted and pent-up energy breaking out into irritable bitterness and angry suspicion. He who had seen so clearly, had judged so rigidly, and had delivered so peremptory a message, was to learn that there was a stronger force still, and that God had a will and a way of His own, larger and mightier, but at the same time infinitely more dilatory and

labyrinthine than the scheme which the prophet would have enforced. He was to learn to the full the awful forces of stupidity and prejudice, of self-interest and baseness, of cruelty and injustice, which made hourly and daily havoc of life and joy. He did not learn to endure this or to acquiesce in it, but he was to be bewildered and afflicted with the sorrow of the soul that sees what is amiss, but is helpless to stop it or to amend it. Yet he was to become, without knowing it, in his humiliation and pain, more august, more pathetic, more noble, more divine, till he was to appear in the minds of all who cared for purity and goodness and beauty, like a seamed and scarred mountain peak, above the peaceful valleys, cold and lonely and isolated, and yet looking out across the fields of life to some awful sunrise of truth, climbing and glimmering over shining tracts and unknown seas.

There have been men of genius, men like Browning and Wordsworth, whose life, but for some natural sorrows temperately borne, have been a joyful and equable progress from strength to strength. But as a rule the penalty or the privilege of genius is to sorrow more bitterly, to labour more sternly than other men ; to torment

itself beyond endurance over the woes that seem so tamely and trivially incurred, which it is powerless to alter. Not to know fame till it is valueless, and to find renown the poorest of flimsy shields against the stings of self-reproach and the agonies of conscious failure. Is there one here—I hope with all my heart that there is more than one—who seeks not vainly or meanly, like the Apostles of old, a seat of glory in the kingdom of God? If so, he must be prepared to drink of the bitter cup, and to find the crown a crown of thorns. It is sweet and seemly, *dulce et decorum*, to desire to deserve fame, and natural enough to desire it whether it be deserved or no. But it is higher still to put that all aside!

And now there settled upon Ruskin's mind a kind of cloud: who shall say how much of it was experience and thought, how much of it the exhaustion of eager work and faculties overstrained? After he had thus exultantly and with intensity of conviction expressed his joy in art, he began to wonder why it was that others did not see what he saw, did not admire and enjoy what he admired and enjoyed. At first, in his earlier writings, one can see the belief, the youthful belief, I must add, which animated him. He

took for granted that the spirit which loved and admired and welcomed beauty, and drank at its springs, was *there* in humanity, but as the years went on, he began to see that it was not so. He saw that, all the world over, the majority of the human race had no care or love for these things at all. He had believed that human beings were dull, only because they admired, or tried to admire, the wrong things, and he had thought that they had only to be shown the right things to admire and love them. But he found that people were at heart indifferent, and worse than indifferent; that the world was full of ugly desires and low delights; that men were selfish and cruel and sensual; that they loved wealth and comfort and display; that many people lived from childhood to age under the shadow of base influences and devastating tyrannies; and so he began to see that if they were to admire and love what was pure and noble, it was not enough just to point out the work of great artists, but the nature of man must be somehow purged and changed. And then he began to speculate as to the causes of all this baseness and ugliness, and, as I say, a shadow crept over him. He had been fond of society and friendship and comfortable domestic life;

but now he withdrew into solitude and sad reflection. He lived much alone in the Alps brooding and meditating over the darkness of the world.

In February, 1861, he wrote to a friend:—

"I was in terrible doubt as to what to do for a long time this last summer and winter. It seemed to me that to keep any clearheadedness, free from intellectual trouble and other pains, no life would do for me but one as like Veronese's as might be, and I was seriously, and despairingly, thinking of going to Paris or Venice and breaking away from all modern society and opinion, and doing I don't know what. Intense scorn of all I had hitherto done or thought, still intenser scorn of other people's doings and thinkings, especially in religion . . . and almost unendurable solitude in my own home, only made more painful to me by parental love which did not and never could help me, and which was cruelly hurtful without knowing it; and terrible discoveries in the course of such investigations as I made into grounds of old faith—were all concerned in this . . . As for things that have influenced me, I believe hard work, love of justice and of beauty, good-nature and great vanity, have done all of me that was worth doing. I've had my heart broken, ages ago, when I was a boy—then mended, cracked, beaten in, kicked about old corridors, and finally, I think, flattened fairly out."

But he was to go down deeper yet into sorrow.

In March, 1863, he wrote from Mornex to his friend Norton :—

"The loneliness is very great, and the peace in which I am at present . . . is only as if I had buried myself in a tuft of grass on a battlefield wet with blood—for the cry of the earth about me is in my ears continually if I do not lay my head to the very ground."

And to similar effect a few months later :—

"I am still very unwell, and tormented between the longing for rest and for lovely life, and the sense of the terrific call of human crime for resistance, and of human misery for help—though it seems to me as the voice of a river of blood which can but sweep me down in the midst of its black clots, helpless."

Moreover he saw that, though much of the havoc was wrought by men who were consciously selfish and tyrannical, yet the worst horrors of the system were perpetuated by kindly orthodox and respectable people, who enjoyed their comforts, and never troubled their head as to what lay behind, nor reflected how many lives of cheerless labour were sacrificed, that they might fare delicately and sleep comfortably. And here one begins to see a hint of the true genius of the man, in his power not of sorrowing mildly and

ineffectively over evils that he could not mend, but in his power of tormenting himself over the troubles of others, his determination to sacrifice himself and his fame to mending what he could, his resolution to use his power and his position to make plain the bitter truth, and to summon all true and brave and compassionate spirits to join him in a desperate crusade against the evils and miseries of the world.

And now he suffered the pain of finding himself utterly withdrawn in spirit from the familiar circle. His parents could not understand what he was about, or why he should desert the path of easy triumph and respectable display for a lonely and thorny path among brambles and stones. What made it worse was that his confident temper, his sense of right vision and just judgment, seemed to hand him instantly the key to these mysteries. With Ruskin to see a problem was to see the solution of it. The difficulties melted away, the obstacles vanished. It was the stupidity of the world that brought about the mischief, not its malevolence or its indifference. He had but to point out the truth, and all well-meaning and reasonable people would see and follow it. So he prepared his lantern again, and

this time its flame was fed with far different hopes and desires.

2

Even as late as the year 1860, which is the year of the great change in Ruskin's mind, his whole ideal of life was a hopeful one. He gave evidence in that year before a Committee of the House of Commons on Public Institutions, in which he spoke of his schemes for educating and instructing the labouring classes, and noted in them a "thirsty desire" for culture and improvement. But this was really the flicker of an expiring flame, and was said more to persuade himself that it was so, than because he really believed it to be so. He was in the summer of that year at Chamonix; but he did little drawing, except in a half-hearted and distracted way. He walked much in the pine-woods, and was thinking out a set of papers, which he wrote with infinite care, and read aloud to his companions at the breakfast-table. The problem he had at heart was a social one. It was no less than an attempt to analyse the meaning of the word wealth, and to give a logical definition of it. And as this book and the next that he wrote were considered by

him to be the most important and valuable contributions he ever made to literature; and as also the ideas he promulgated have become in many ways familiar to and accepted by the present generation, it will be as well to pay careful attention to them. Now I am very far from saying or believing that these ideas were invented or originated by Ruskin. That is not the way in which great ideas spring up. They arise, I believe, naturally, by a perfectly inevitable development in the minds of a generation. They are talked about, hinted at, thought about, half enunciated by a great many speakers and writers; and then some one author of force and position focusses the scattered rays, and a definite school of thought springs up.

The title Ruskin gave his book was *Unto this Last*. It is taken from the words of the parable about the labourers in the vineyard, who at the end of the day were all paid alike—"I will give unto this last even as unto thee." His idea was roughly thus—and here I would say that I am following closely Mrs. Meynell's masterly analysis of the book—that wages of labour should be a fixed thing, not varying according to competition. He said that soldiers and sailors, govern-

ment officials, railway-men, servants, and schoolmasters received fixed wages, varying more by the importance of their work than by its actual quality; and that moreover revolutionary and socialistic ideas did not spread among people thus paid, while they did spread among people whose wages varied in sympathy with commercial competition. If this was so, why, he asked should not labour be paid on the same lines? He maintained that the work of people paid on fixed lines did not suffer in quality because of the comparative sense of security; that the unnatural thing was that the bad workman should be able to offer his work at a lower price, so as to undersell the good workman; and that the natural course was to regulate this, not to leave it unregulated. He believed that the inequalities of employment, the feverish over-production of one period, and the languid under-production of another, would be harmonised and tranquillised by the regulation of wages, while education would tend to diminish the number of bad workmen. He thought too that the employers would come to realise the administrative nature of their functions, like the lawyer and the bishop and the statesman, and regard themselves as servants of the State,

whose duty was to provide and supply commodities, rather than as men aiming at grabbing what profit they could at the expense of the community. He held that the commercial system was based upon the art of keeping others poor, if possible; and that people were misled by seeing a class enriched into thinking that the community was therefore richer. The economists of the day maintained that demand and supply could not be controlled by human legislation. To this Ruskin replied: "Precisely in the same sense . . . the waters of the world go where they are required. Where the land falls the water flows. . . . But the disposition and the administration . . . can be altered by human forethought."

Of course this is all really socialistic, because it is opposed to irresponsible individualistic forces, such as competition and monopoly; but Ruskin maintained that he was a Free Trader, though on grounds wholly opposed to the popular theories of Free Trade. He went on to define wealth as the possession of a large stock of useful articles which we can use; and his plea was for publicity about all commercial dealing. "The general law," he writes, "respecting just or economical exchange is simply this: there

must be advantage on both sides (or if only advantage on one, at least no disadvantage on the other) . . . and just payment for his time, intelligence, and labour to any intermediate person effecting the transaction. . . . And whatever advantage there is on either side, and whatever pay is given to the intermediate person, should be thoroughly known."

His main solution was this. "Not greater wealth, but simpler pleasure. . . . Waste nothing and grudge nothing. Care in nowise to make more of money, but care to make much of it; remembering always the great, palpable, inevitable fact —that what one person has, another cannot have. . . . And if, on due and honest thought over these things, it seems that the kind of existence to which men are now summoned by every plea of pity and claim of right may, for some time at least, not be a luxurious one;—consider whether, even supposing it guiltless, luxury could be desired by any of us, if we saw clearly at our sides the suffering which accompanies it in the world . . . the cruellest man living could not sit at his feast, unless he sat blindfold."

Now does all this seem a fantastic dream, or does it seem, at this date, only a somewhat

belated perception of obvious truths? All this translated into modern English is but the principle of the living wage, the old age pension, public education, improved housing and compensation for improvements. These are all ideas upon which there is some difference of opinion, but the principles are familiar, and accepted by all reasonable people.

Yet what was the reception of Ruskin's book? He sent the papers to the *Cornhill*, of which his friend Thackeray was the editor. Three papers appeared; and then Thackeray, writing frankly and kindly, said that they were so universally condemned and disliked that he could only admit one more—and this to a man who was known as one of the most brilliant and popular writers of the day. He himself took his defeat very hard, and fell into great depression. "He sulked," he wrote of himself, through the winter, drawing a good deal, and working fitfully, but in enfeebled health. Later on in the following year he went off to Switzerland, and established himself in a little chalet near Geneva, two thousand feet up, at the end of all carriage roads. He thought of buying and restoring a fine old château. But he gave up the idea, saying "that he never had the

gift, nor had he then the energy, to make anything of a place." So he rambled about and wrote a set of papers on political economy, now known as *Munera Pulveris*, which he sent to Froude, then editor of *Fraser's Magazine*. The result was even more disastrous than before. "Only a genius like Mr. Ruskin could have produced such hopeless rubbish," said a leading newspaper. His father, then not far from his end, spoke his mind in sorrow and bitterness; not only did he hate the sacrifice of reputation involved, and the obloquy which resulted, but he thought the whole theory absurd and perverse.

Carlyle, almost alone of his friends, stood by Ruskin. He said of the two books that he approved of them in every particular; that in every part of *Unto this Last*, just published in book form, he found "a high and noble sort of truth, not one doctrine that I can intrinsically dissent from or count other than salutary in the extreme, and pressingly needed in England above all."

But the public would have none of it. The publisher of *Fraser's* told Froude flatly that the series must stop, and only four papers appeared. Carlyle, talking to Froude on the subject, said "that when Solomon's Temple was building it

was credibly reported that at least ten thousand sparrows sitting on the trees round declared that it was entirely wrong—quite contrary to received opinion—hopelessly condemned by public opinion, &c. Nevertheless it got finished, and the sparrows flew away and began to chirp in the same note about something else."

3

But all this helped Ruskin little. He fell into great despondency, which he tried to relieve by a study of Alpine Geology. And then a fresh sorrow fell upon him. His father died in 1864. He showed his confidence in his son by bequeathing him a great fortune, £120,000 in cash, besides much house property, and leaving the house and £37,000 to his wife. Father and son had come together again in the last few months, to Ruskin's infinite happiness. The first use he made of his fortune was to hand over some £17,000 to relatives to whom the arrangements of the will had caused disappointment, and to spend nearly as much in setting up a relative in trade, who promptly lost the whole sum. The money melted away like snow in his hands; he devoted himself to his mother

and tried to fill the gap: he was always the tenderest and most dutiful of sons.

The epitaph he inscribed over his father's grave in the churchyard of Shirley, near Croydon, is so beautiful and so characteristic that I may here quote it—

"Here rests from day's well sustained burden John James Ruskin, born in Edinburgh May 10th, 1785. He died in his house in London, March 3rd, 1864. He was an entirely honest merchant, and his memory is to all who keep it dear and helpful. His son, whom he loved to the uttermost, and taught to speak truth, says this of him."

Yet at the same time he had been enjoying a happy and compensating experience. The headmistress of a big girls' boarding-school at Winnington in Cheshire had taken some pupils to hear him lecture in Manchester, and persuaded him to pay the school a visit. It was a great old-fashioned country house, in a park of fine trees sloping down to a river. The idea was to make the whole thing as homelike as possible. Ruskin was always fond of girlhood, though there is no evidence that he took the slightest interest in boyhood. He had never been at school

himself, and little boys were to him like miniature savages, in whom the selfishness, the cruelty, and the boisterousness of humanity had not been chastened or refined by experience. One cannot have everything in everybody; and it is idle to deny a certain feminine touch in Ruskin's nature, instinctive and fostered by seclusion, which made him all his life more at ease in the society of women than of men. Perhaps he overvalued sympathy and demonstrative affection and petting and tender ways of life; sometimes the long-haired maidens of Winnington betrayed him into a sort of semi-paternal sentimentality. But to sneer at it all, or to grudge him the sort of happiness he derived from it, is a cheap and coarse cynicism. He was a very unhappy man at this time, feeling the weight of the world, conscious of failure and ineffectiveness. And the children at Winnington gave him what he needed, and what only a few very wise and tender-hearted men—friends like Carlyle, Burne-Jones, Norton, and Acland could give him; like the little maid in Guenevere, these merry and wholesome-minded girls "pleased him with a babbling heedlessness that often lured him from himself." He devised games and dances for them; he told them stories, taught

them drawing: for ten years he was a constant visitor. He wrote a little book for them, *Ethics of the Dust*, a set of conversational lectures on Crystals; but the girls to whom the book was playfully dedicated did not wholly appreciate it. They recognised their own portraits, drawn with a gentle perception of their little failings; but nearly twenty years after, the book, which had wholly hung fire, bounded into popularity, and it was seen that in education, as in many other things, Ruskin had been a few steps in advance of his time.

In 1866 he had more melancholy experiences. His great friend Lady Trevelyan was ordered abroad, and Ruskin took his cousin Joanna with him to join her. The day that he started, he called at Carlyle's house at Cheyne Walk, to leave a few flowers as a parting gift with Mrs. Carlyle, that wonderfully gifted, sharp-tongued, courageous, devoted woman, whose life had been so full of strange suffering, and who won such intense affection from her friends. He was told at the door that Mrs. Carlyle had died suddenly in her carriage that afternoon, from the shock of trying to save her dog from being run over. Carlyle was away in Scotland, delivering a Rectorial

address at Edinburgh. Ruskin wrote to Carlyle, and received in reply from the old man, writing in the depth of his remorseful agony of spirit, one of the noblest letters I know in literature.

"Your kind words were welcome to me; thanks. I did not doubt your sympathy in what has come; but it is better that I see it laid before me. You are yourself very unhappy, as I too well discern—heavy-laden, obstructed and dispirited; but you have a great work still ahead, and will gradually have to gird yourself up against the *heat of the day*, which is coming on for you, as the Night too is coming. Think valiantly of these things. . . .

". . . my life all laid in ruins, and the one light of it as if gone out. . . . Come and see me when you get home; come *oftener* and see me, and speak *more* frankly to me, (for I am very true to your highest interests and you) while I still remain here. You can do nothing for me in Italy; except come home improved." [*i.e.* in health.]

But before the letter reached Ruskin, Lady Trevelyan was dead, after a few days' illness at Neuchâtel. He threw himself into the sad task of trying to comfort and sustain the rest of the party, and wrote to a friend in England:—

"I've had a rather bad time of it at Neuchâtel; what with death and the north wind; both devil's

inventions as far as I can make out. But things are looking a little better now, and I had a lovely three hours' walk by the lake shore, in cloudless calm, from five to eight this morning, under hawthorn and chestnut—here just in full blossom —and among other pleasantnesses—too good for mortals, as the North Wind and the rest of it are too bad. We don't deserve either such blessing or such cursing, it seems to poor moth me."

And now he flung himself again into schemes for social reform. There was a working man of Sunderland, a cork-cutter called Thomas Dixon, who wrote to Ruskin, raising several practical points. Ruskin replied in a series of twenty-five letters, in which he constructed a kind of Utopia, an ideal commonwealth on mediæval and feudal lines. He designed a system of trade guilds, a state church, a theory of government. It is semi-socialistic and semi-individualistic—indeed it is hard to classify; but the point is that outward liberty can only be based on inward law.

The book was mercilessly derided, and it is impossible not to feel that he almost courted derision by elaborating fantastic details. The same thing vitiated his work later on. The prophet must indicate laws rather than lay down ordinances; and there was plenty of people who could not under-

stand the nobility of the book, who were quite able to laugh at the idea of young unmarried people being examined in moral culture, and receiving a degree or diploma—they were to be called respectively bachelors and *rosières*—before they could obtain a licence to marry. Ruskin never quite understood that humanity must settle its own details, and will not make a clean sweep of accustomed traditions. But *Time and Tide, by Wear and Tyne*, as the book is beautifully called, has a real value, for all its pretty absurdities, and must be studied by all who wish to discern the progress of Ruskin's mind.

In these distracted years he wandered much about England, lost himself a little in the study of Mineralogy, invented a new theory of mountain cleavage, experimenting with custard and dough. It is a desultory record. No doubt his health had much to do with his feverish and fitful interests; and he had a private sorrow deep in his heart; but through it all one discerns what I have before spoken of, and what, if one overlooks, one misses the real significance of Ruskin's life—the intense preoccupation with the idea of helping and improving the life of humanity. Mental depression is often a phy-

sical thing and an unreal thing; but it does one thing—it brings out what is deepest in a man, though it exaggerates and darkens the picture. Such sorrows show what a man really cares about at the bottom of his heart; and though one may say that Ruskin took a distorted and pessimistic view of life and its issues, yet grief revealed his true hopes and fears. An idler and a shallower man would have drifted into hypochondria and invalidism. Ruskin tormented himself into something like insanity over the unintelligible riddle of the world.

But one need not darken the picture. He was a man who could rule himself. And there were countless people at this time who wrote to him and met him, who found him the truest of friends and the most delightful of companions. Men and women in trouble and doubt and perplexity wrote to him from all over England, and received in reply letters full of humour and shrewdness and good sense. Hardly a letter ever came from his pen which has not some delicious stroke of humour, some deep and arresting phrase; while to his companions his very desultoriness had an incessant charm. He would pass from subject to subject, show pictures or minerals with marvel-

lous perception of their motive and quality; and it is strange that one, whose utterances are often so dogmatic and even so perverse, should have been in private life so courteous and winning, so gay and modest. Few people probably suspected the strain at which he was living, or the helpless distress with which in his solitary moments he fell into despondency and even fury of misery over the wrongs and sufferings of the world. And all the time he was lecturing, sketching, revising, writing, with an industry that burnt like a steady flame. He went to Venice in order to correct his *Stones of Venice;* here he had a great joy, the discovery of Carpaccio's pictures; and for a little while he seemed to recover the joy of his youth. He was enraptured by the frescoes of the life of St. Ursula; and the study of her legend played so curious a part in his after life that I must say a few words about it. He may almost have been said to have fallen in love with St. Ursula, with a spiritual passion such as Dante's. She became a living ideal, a sort of patron saint to him. Her patience and her sweetness became to him a pattern and an example; and the thought of her, as one of his old friends wrote, "led him—not always,

but far more than his correspondents knew—to burn the letters of sharp retort upon stupidity and impertinence, and to force the wearied brain and overstrung nerves into patience and a kindly answer."

There followed a time of quiet work at home; there was much business to be done. His cousin Joanna Agnew, now Mrs. Severn, was installed at Herne Hill. This had a very beneficial result upon Ruskin's health and state of mind. The business drew off his thoughts from the problems of life and from his own sense of failure, in the direction of hard mechanical tangible work. His cousin—I may venture to say this, because it is an open secret to her innumerable friends—was the most perfect sisterly influence that had ever come into his life. She was, and is, one of the most tender-hearted, sympathetic, and blithe of beings. She had great practical energy, complete unselfishness, and abounding cheerfulness; and she threw the whole of her large-hearted nature into the congenial and instinctive task of making her immediate circle happy. Indeed, her companionship was one of the supreme blessings of Ruskin's life—she shone like the sun upon his mournful temperament. And then too a bereavement has a

wonderful way of evoking love. People often learn, in the shadow of a great loss, how little all the restless aims of humanity really count, when compared with the nurture and tendance of devoted affection. They sorrow over old coldnesses and past instances of selfishness and hardness. They try to do better, to be more tender, more self-effacing. Ruskin himself, with all his wistful longings for human sympathy, was a lonely man; and his harsh old mother, for all her grimness and censoriousness, had a spring of exquisite devotion in her heart. The two tried hard, in this dark time, to be more to each other, and built up a new bond, rooted in sorrow, which never afterwards wholly failed them.

His mother was now nearly ninety years of age, almost blind, but in full vigour of mind, and ruling her household and her son with inexorable kindness. She had quite a retinue of aged and inefficient servants, none of whom were ever sent away, and for whom duties proportioned to blindness and decrepitude had to be invented. Grim she was, but she loved her son "like an old fierce lioness," and though she snubbed him unmercifully herself and ordered him about, she would allow no one else to disparage him. She died in

the last month of the year 1871, saying that she did not hope to be so high in heaven as to be with her husband, but perhaps near enough to see him. And Ruskin was left with a surprising sense of loneliness. "Here, beside my father's body," he wrote on her tomb, "I have laid my mother's: nor was dearer earth ever returned to earth, nor purer life recorded in heaven."

He wrote, long years after, to a great friend:—

"There is no human sorrow like it. The father's loss, however loved he may have been, yet can be in great part replaced by friendship with old and noble friends. The mother's is a desolation which I could not have conceived, till I felt it. When I lost my mistress, the girl for whom I wrote *Sesame and Lilies*, I had no more —nor have ever had since, nor shall have—any joy in exertion: but the loss of my mother took from me the power of Rest."

4

And Carlyle too opened his heart wide to the friend who was set on speaking wholesome truth to the world, and who had been so sternly rebuffed. We can hear the echoes of Carlyle's talks and Carlyle's ideas—the "heroic, aristocratic stoic ideals," as they have been finely called—

in Ruskin's work. Carlyle was much interested then in the question of public libraries, and gave Ruskin's mind an impulse in this direction. The result was a book—three lectures—which is perhaps the most popular of all Ruskin's writings, and also one of the best and most memorable of his utterances—the little volume known whimsically enough as *Sesame and Lilies*. No one has ever rightly fathomed the meaning of the title. Sesame is, I believe, a kind of oily seed or grain that used to be made into biscuits—it has nothing here to do with the charm "Open Sesame" in the story in the *Arabian Nights*, at which all doors flew open; and there is a quotation from Isaiah, which Ruskin makes, about lilies blooming in the desert. I suppose the things symbolised are solid nurture and pure loveliness.

The first lecture, *Of King's Treasuries*, under cover of being a plea for solid reading, is really a denunciation of mere reading, and particularly of purposeless reading. Ruskin makes a kind of *Index Expurgatorius;* and as he bans and excludes all theologians, except Jeremy Taylor, and the work of all non-Christian moralists, except the Morte d'Arthur, Sophocles, and Euripides, all modern historians, all philosophers, all Thackeray, George

Eliot, Kingsley, Swift, Hume, Macaulay, and Emerson, to mention just a few of his bugbears, the result is not a very wide range of reading. But here, as so often in Ruskin, the book is only a statement of passionate personal preferences ; and as Ruskin, side by side with impassioned blessing, could never refrain from copious cursing, the verdict need not be taken as final. His main thesis was, that as life was short and leisure scanty, no time should be wasted in reading worthless books.

He begins by laying down a principle about the effects of reading. He says that the ordinary reader, on laying down a book, is apt to say, "How good that is—that's exactly what I think." The right feeling, Ruskin says, is rather, "How strange that is! I never thought of that before, and yet I see that it is true, or if I do not, I hope I shall some day;" and he adds the advice, "Be sure that you go to the author to get at his meaning, not to find yours."[1]

From this principle I humbly and heartily dissent. My own belief is rather that no human being is ever taught anything unless he knows it already; that one goes to books to recognise and not to learn; that the best and most inspiring

authors are not those who tell you what they believe, but who show the reader what he believes; and that the writers who really move an age are those who express clearly and forcibly what most people are feeling lamely and obscurely, while the authors who fail to get a hearing—I am speaking of course of men of proved and unquestioned power—are those who are either behind the age or in advance of it. That is only my own opinion, and one is quite at liberty to believe Ruskin!

Then there is a curious passage about the intent study of words. And this again is vitiated by prejudice. Ruskin regretted the introduction into English of Greek and Latin words, and viewed their intrusion as he might view a torrent of mud poured into a crystal pool—"our mongrel tongue" he calls it. And this declaration I must not only combat, I must firmly and seriously deny it. The extraordinary richness and elasticity of English, our incomparable language, is entirely due to the fact that we have had no fastidious delicacy or pedantic severity about taking words for our use. If we want a word, we find one; if a word gets limited to a nuance, we take another word for another shade of meaning. Language was made for man, not man for language. We

do not always choose euphoniously, or with due regard for the seemly sight and sound of words; and we have too a rather illiterate admiration for polysyllabic vocables. But I have no patience whatever with purists who would arrest the development of a language. In language, I am all for free trade rather than for protection. Ruskin's own writing, pure and melodious as it is, is a perpetual contradiction to his own principles. Of course there is an exquisite beauty in sweet old large homely words; but as thought becomes finer and more subtle, language must grow more elastic. And I must beg of you not to be misled in this matter by the pedants whose economy of language corresponds to leanness of thought.

The second lecture is *On Queen's Gardens*. It is addressed to the women of the leisured classes, and Ruskin draws out his ideal of pure womanhood as the counterpart of knightly chivalry. He shows what the heroic temper of womanhood ought to be, and how it may be achieved. "The fashion of the time," he says, "renders whatever is forward, coarse, or senseless, in feminine nature, palpable to all men." The girl is to be trained in accurate thought; not to be brought up in a prudish and unreal mystery, but to learn the

loveliness, and the inevitableness too, of natural laws. She is "to follow," he says, "at least some one path of scientific attainment as far as to the threshold of that bitter Valley of Humiliation, into which only the wisest and bravest of men can descend, owning themselves for ever children, gathering pebbles on a boundless shore."

Then he turns to the girl herself. He shows that men are bound by law and circumstance, but that "against the sins of womanhood there is no legislation, against her destructiveness no national protest, no public opinion against her cruelty." He implores her to learn not to be idle, but to cultivate her natural compassion with all her might, and to use it daily and hourly to heal the pain of the world.

Here Ruskin is at his very noblest and highest, on sure and incontestable ground. And the visible pulse and thrill of his thought gains a poignant intensity from the fact that he had one particular girl in view, of whom I must speak later, the love of whom was the deepest passion of Ruskin's life, and her rejection of his love the deepest sorrow that ever devastated his days. And then to these two lectures he added a third, "The Mystery of Life and its Arts," which every one

must read who desires to spell the secret of Ruskin's hope and the secret of his despair. It contains some of the most intimate confidences he ever published. He here shows himself aghast at the differences of so many men to the purpose and the effect of life. He sees the steps of history thronged with great figures, the poet, the priest, and the artist, bringing down, like Moses from the Mount the very writing of God; and in the face of this, mankind hurries heedlessly and helplessly on its way, raking in the dirt and straws of the street, with the heavenly crown hanging within reach of the oblivious hand. His own failure stares him in the face.

"I have had," he writes, "what, in many respects, I boldly call the misfortune, to set my words somewhat prettily together; not without a foolish vanity in the poor knack I had of doing so; until I was heavily punished for this pride, by finding that many people thought of the words only and cared nothing for the meaning."

He had given, he says, ten of his best years to proclaiming the merits of Turner, and to sorting and making available for public contemplation, Turner's work. All this had been regarded with entire indifference.

"I spent," he writes, "the ten strongest years of my life (from twenty to thirty) in endeavouring to show the excellence of the work of the man whom I believed, and rightly believed, to be the greatest painter of the schools of England since Reynolds. I had then perfect faith in the power of every great truth or beauty to prevail ultimately. . . . Fortunately or unfortunately, an opportunity of perfect trial undeceived me at once and for ever."

He found that the public entirely neglected the drawings; a few people dawdled in to glance at them, but that was all. His years of work had all been lost.

"For that I did not so much care; I had, at least, learned my own business thoroughly. . . . But what I did care for was the—to me frightful—discovery, that the most splendid genius in the arts might be permitted by Providence to labour and perish uselessly, . . . that the glory of it was perishable as well as invisible. . . . That was the first mystery of life to me."

Of course we are all at liberty to think, and if we think, to say, that this is all very unreal and fantastic and emotional and unbalanced. What an outcry about a parcel of drawings, scratches of ink and blobs of colour! No one can object to

the Englishman who prides himself on his commonsense and his sturdy welfare calling it all moonshine and nonsense. But not by commonsense and sturdy welfare does the world make progress. There were plenty of good-humoured Sadducees who doubtless felt even so about the Sermon on the Mount. It is better to be on the side of the heroes and of the saints; and even if we cannot feel with them or see into their meaning, we can at least abstain from stoning them and decrying them. I do not myself see a hundredth part of what Ruskin saw in Turner. I think many of his paintings grotesque and impossible. But still I have no doubt that the victory is rather with those who see and believe and feel; and I admire with all my heart this awful power, which prophets have, of raging helplessly against the hard facts of life, of knocking themselves blind and senseless against the stupidities and brutalities of human nature. I can at least regret my own indifference, and recognise it to be an ugly, complacent, short-sighted thing. I need not hold it up like a shield against the darts of God, or make it into an image for my delight and worship; and there is something to me not only horribly pathetic in the sight of Ruskin's tears and cries, but something infinitely

uplifting and inspiring in the contemplation of them. I come idly to see the fantastic struggles of some demented person; and I discover that they are the irrepressible agonies of a martyr in the flame.

LECTURE IV

I

IN the summer of 1869 Ruskin was working his hardest in Italy, as I have said. His mother was very anxious about him, and implored him to come out of the heat and take a rest; but he lingered on. On the 14th of August, at Verona, he was packing up to go home, having finished his last sketch, when he received a telegram announcing that he had been elected to the Slade Professorship of Fine Art at Oxford. "Which will give me," he wrote to his mother, "as much power as I can well use—and would have given pleasure to my poor father—and therefore to me—once."

It gave him, no doubt, more pleasure than he knew. It was not a question of gratified ambition. He was quite indifferent to money and station; but it was a sign that there were men of weight and sense who believed in him and his work; it gave him an accredited position,

and opened a door to him. He would be able to affect, by direct teaching and personal contact, the minds of the rising generation, at their most generous and enthusiastic stage; and Oxford too was very dear to him; he had fallen, as all Oxford men do—more I think than Cambridge men—under the incomparable and indefinable charm of that home of lost causes and mediæval dreams. Not that this is all that Oxford stands for; but it has the particular touch of idealism about it, such as surrounds the dethroned monarch and the exiled claimant, pursuing with Quixotic devotion some unrealisable vision. To what extent Ruskin meant to lecture upon Art cannot be stated. He had for some years been writing about half-a-dozen lectures a year, which filled an annual volume. Now only twelve annual lectures were required of him. But he planned, as he always did, a gigantic scheme of art-teaching, which he could not have carried out if he had lectured daily for a dozen years. He proposed to revise the whole of his theory of art, and to write lectures which should begin with first principles and ramify into every technical branch of art, to conclude with an encyclopædic history of art in general. But he

did not intend to drop any of his other schemes. The result was that his work finally and completely broke down both his health and his mental powers. It must be remembered that he was now a man of fifty, conscious of failure, wrestling with intense irritation at the general drift of human society. He had six months before his work began. Strained and overworked as he was, he set to. Corpus Christi College made him an Honorary Fellow, and gave him a set of rooms; and on 8th February 1870 he appeared in his lecture room to deliver his inaugural address.

The most extraordinary scene followed. It must be remembered that he was in many ways the man of the hour. Every one knew his brilliant and suggestive books, and his schemes—wild as they were thought—of social reform. His extraordinary charm of personality, which soaked into all his writings and gave his readers a sense of intimate and individual contact with a man of genius; his wealth, and the use he had made of it; his amazing vehemence of speech, his reckless daring of thought, had all created a curiosity about him of which he was hardly conscious. The place was packed an hour before; the ante-rooms and passages were blocked; there

was a vociferous and disappointed crowd in the street.

After a hurried conference, a friend pushed his way to the desk, and announced that the meeting would adjourn to the Sheldonian Theatre. The great man, slim and bent, with his piercing blue eyes, under shaggy eyebrows, his long brown hair, his thin whiskers, his grim mouth, stepped to the rostrum. His dress was even then old-fashioned. A stiff blue frock-coat with a light waistcoat and trousers—long loose linen cuffs; high collars of the Gladstone type; a bright blue stock tie, like an early Victorian statesman. A silk gown which he briskly discarded, to leave him free to gesticulate, and the velvet cap of a gentleman-commoner. Such was the figure that came forward. He had few gifts of formal delivery. He began by reading a very elaborate passage in a very artificial cadence. Then he would break off, and begin to interpolate and extemporise with immense vivacity and free gestures. Sometimes he was dramatic in action. In his lecture on birds, he strode about like a rook, he swooped like a swallow. But grotesque as the performance easily might have been, it carried every one away by its eagerness and sincerity.

And his glance was of the magnetic and arresting sort. Some of his hearers confessed to the indescribable sensation, like the kindling of the soul, which fell on them if his eyes seemed for a moment to dwell upon them.

Whatever Ruskin felt, it was clear to him from that moment that at Oxford, at all events, he could get a hearing, and he hurled himself into his work with intense enthusiasm. He started a drawing school and endowed it. He showered down gifts on the place, pictures, casts, engravings. He gave endless parties and receptions. He even enlisted a party of undergraduates to help in an experiment of road-making up at Hinksey. The road was made, and was infamously inadequate for all purposes of locomotion. And so the first years sped busily away.

In letters written in 1871 and 1872 to his friend Norton, he describes his lecture work :—

"I am always unhappy, and see no good in saying so. But I am settling to my work here,—recklessly,—to do my best with it, feeling quite that it is talking at hazard, for what chance good may come. But I attend regularly in the schools as mere drawing-master, and the men begin to come one by one—about fifteen or twenty

already;—several worth having as pupils in any way, being of temper to make good growth of."

And again:—

"I am, as usual, unusually busy. When I get fairly into my lecture work at Oxford, I always find that the lecture would come better some other way, just before it is given, and so work hand to mouth."

Perhaps I may mention here a remarkable satire which was written at the end of the seventies by a young Oxford man who had just taken his degree, who has since become famous in literature, —Mr. W. H. Mallock.

The book is an account of a party of people who meet for a week-end visit at a country house, and discuss all sorts of problems in life and art. Some of the most famous men of the day, such as Huxley, Matthew Arnold, Jowett, and Pater are here depicted with inimitable ingenuity and wit. Many of Mr. Mallock's happiest effects in the book are produced by introducing actual words or sentiments of these great men in a grotesque context and with absurd applications. Many of them were probably hardly known to the author at all; but Mr. Mallock had known and observed Ruskin at Oxford; and Mr. Herbert, under which

name Ruskin appears, is undoubtedly the hero of the book. Portentous as the paradoxes put in his mouth are, extravagant as the emotions are which he is made to express, though the sentiment is fantastic and hyperbolical, yet one feels that he is somehow pursued through the book by the emotions of the author, and that he alone is allowed to appear sincere and impressive. I would recommend any one who is interested in the striking figures of the time and their relation to each other's thought, to read the book carefully. One can often complete the picture of a man by a contemporary caricature in a way in which one cannot complete it by subsequent panegyrics, however reverential.

2

I must now return to other memorable enterprises which all date from these years of Oxford activity. It was now that Ruskin began to issue what is the most heterogeneous and yet characteristic book that ever came from his pen, *Fors Clavigera*. I hardly dare to recommend it to you; and yet any one who desires to see the innermost side of Ruskin's heart and mind, must make up his mind to wade through the great volumes.

Let me attempt to describe the indescribable. *Fors Clavigera* was a series of letters addressed to the workers of England, issued in monthly parts. It ran at last into eight volumes. The title is what is called in *Alice in Wonderland* a portmanteau-word, crammed with symbolism. *Fors* stood at once for destiny and courage; *Clavigera* means either club-bearing, or nail-bearing, or key-bearing. The Club was a symbol of action, the Nail of fate, and the Key was the key of heavenly mystery. All this must be borne in mind. If one asks what it was about, I can only reply in the words of Aristophanes: *περὶ σοῦ, περὶ ἐμοῦ, περὶ ἁπάντων πραγμάτων*,—about you, about me, about everything in the world; but the general motive of the book is the redressing of social misery and collective poverty.

"For my own part," he says in the first letter, "I will put up with this state of things, passively, not an hour longer. I am not an unselfish person, nor an Evangelical one; I have no particular pleasure in doing good; neither do I dislike doing it so much as to expect to be rewarded for it in another world. But I simply cannot paint, nor read, nor look at minerals, nor do anything else that I like, . . . because of the misery that I know of, and see signs of, where

I know it not, which no imagination can interpret too bitterly."

He preached a communism of wealth and joy, and took up his parable against luxury and selfishness, idle accumulation and tyrannical oppression. The tide of eloquence goes rolling on, like a fiery flow of lava, full of endless digressions into autobiography and art, into poetry and legend and romance; now telling the life-story of a hero like Walter Scott, now drifting into mysticism, now designing a new coinage, passing from a plan for sub-alpine reservoirs to a description of Carpaccio's *Sleeping Princess*. Sometimes there is a long extract from Marmontel or Addison's *Spectator;* and it is all full of that melancholy humour, that caressing fondness, that moving pathos, that intense sadness that made Ruskin the delight of the world, and yet drove him raging into the wilderness. One may be bored by *Fors*, one may lose one's way in it, one may fall into hopeless irritation at the childish waywardness, the unpractical inconsequence of the book. But there is no book quite like it in the world, because it is looking straight down into the very current of a great and, alas, disordered mind.

Few men can ever have thought so rapidly,

so intensely, with such momentary concentration and yet with such wild diffuseness as Ruskin; and fewer still have the power of translating the vague dreams and reveries of thought into such absolutely limpid and beautiful words. So that it is like standing by a clear mountain stream, and seeing, through its swift ripples and amber curves, the very pebbles over which it flows and the ribbons of trailing water-weed, all transfigured and glorified by the magical enchantment of art.

And then too, as *Fors* went on, Ruskin took to printing in it some of the letters he received, both of sympathisers and opponents. He was strangely candid about the latter, and included letters of the most personal and even abusive kind; but as he often also printed his own replies, and as he was a master of the art of humorous invective, the impression given was as a rule favourable to himself. Here is a good instance. An impertinent critic wrote to him, and in the course of the letter said:

"Since you disparage so much iron and its manufacture, may it be asked how your books are printed, and how is their paper made? Probably you are aware that both printing and paper-making machines are made of that material."

Ruskin replied :—

"SIR,—I am indeed aware that printing and paper-making machines are made of iron. I am aware also, which you perhaps are not, that ploughshares and knives and forks are. And I am aware, which you certainly are not, that I am writing with an iron pen. And you will find in *Fors Clavigera*, and in all my other writings, which you may have done me the honour to read, that my statement is that things which have to do the work of iron should be made of iron, and things which have to do the work of wood should be made of wood; but that (for instance) hearts should not be made of iron, nor heads of wood—and this last statement you may wisely consider when next it enters into yours to ask questions."

Fors Clavigera is very rich in incidental judgments and characterisations; indeed it is this that gives it its chief value. The matter of it is so discursive, that at times it is only rescued from tediousness by its extreme intensity of thought and its purity of utterance. One may wish that Ruskin could have applied himself more coherently to definite points, but upon reflection one is glad to leave the method entirely in his own hands. In the first place, when he treated a subject allegorically, he was accustomed to subdivide his material under very elaborate headings. I think

that this was one of the things that recommended his earlier writings to the stolid British mind. The British mind cares much less about ideas than about the arrangement of ideas. It has a pathetic belief in the value of correct information, and it will attempt to assimilate an idea which is communicated in the guise of headings and subdivisions, because it believes that the subject is being treated seriously, and that it is somehow or other getting cash value for its money. It is more concerned for instance to know that the gifts of the spirit are sevenfold, and that there are seven deadly sins, than to realise the nature of sin and of grace. But Ruskin's headings are very misleading. They not only do not cover the whole ground, but they trespass on each other's ground. There are plenty of cases where Ruskin will divide a subject into heads, and not only will he omit obvious subdivisions, but four or five of his headings will prove to be almost identical. It is an ironical proof of the turn of the Anglo-Saxon reader for the book-keeping theory of literature, that it accepted Ruskin's art-teaching, much of which was fantastic and inaccurate, because it was conveyed under the form of subdivisions. Whereas when he became painfully and feverishly

in earnest, and wrote as he felt, the public became unable to follow his argument, and thought it vague and disjointed.

Moreover, it seems to me that Ruskin's effect on the world was the effect of a personality and not the effect of a reasoned philosophy; and there is no doubt that one gets far nearer to the mind of Ruskin and to his ideas in *Fors* than one ever does in *Modern Painters*. Much of *Modern Painters* consists of brilliant attractive thoughts, born of the intellect rather than of the heart, which came lightly and fancifully, and were swiftly and gracefully set down. But in *Fors* it is as though one saw some awful spiritual combat proceeding, like the wrestling of Jacob by night with the angel on Penuel, whose form he could not see and whose nature he could not guess, whether he meant to test his strength, or to overcome him and leave him maimed. And just as the angel, though he was an angel of light, made the sinew of the halting thigh shrink at his fiery touch, so Ruskin too emerged from the conflict a shattered man; and to myself, I will frankly confess, it is just this heart-breaking conflict, this appalling struggle with mighty thoughts and dreadful fears, that made at once the tragedy and the glory of Ruskin's

life, because it broke his pride and humbled his complacency, and crowned him with the hero's crown. For let me say once and for all, that under all his irony and humour, under his unbalanced vehemence and his no less unbalanced sorrow, Ruskin's work, if not severely logical, was neither eccentric nor irresponsible. Its soundness, its ultimate sanity, was confirmed and not depreciated by subsequent events.

But in spite of all this it must be frankly confessed that *Fors* is a difficult work to comprehend. Ruskin seems at times to be following no definite line of thought; yet one of the delights of it is the great variety of true and beautiful judgments on all sorts of points connected with art and literature and morality. Let me give a single extract, where he is dealing with the moral novelists of the nineteenth century, as a specimen of characterisation which is as suggestive and as true as it is bold and humorous.

"Miss Edgeworth," he says, "made her morality so impertinent that, since her time, it has only been with fear and trembling that any good novelist has ventured to show the slightest bias in favour of the Ten Commandments. Scott made his romance so ridiculous, that, since his day, one can't help fancying helmets were always

paste-board and horses were always hobby. Dickens made everybody laugh, or cry, so that they could not go about their business till they had got their faces in wrinkles; and Thackeray settled like a meat-fly on whatever one had got for dinner, and made one sick of it."

I don't say that this is a fair or a generous or a complete criticism. But it is hideously clever, and touches the weaknesses of the mighty with a sure hand. Yet by this kind of levity he lost friends, who thought that he could not be in earnest when he trifled with cherished beliefs; though it is inconceivable that any human being can have overlooked the mortal and deadly earnestness that runs through the whole; and if Ruskin did lose a few precisians and unimaginative persons at the time, he gained and will gain a host of admirers and lovers by his gay frankness, and the sense of charming vivacity that runs through the book.

3

Ruskin had, before the date of which I am speaking, made one or two attempts to put his principles into practical shape. He had been left a few small houses in Marylebone by his father, and he had put them in charge of a lady-

pupil of his, Miss Octavia Hill, whose name has since become famous as a philanthropic worker on similar lines. His point was that a good landlord could, if he abjured high profits, give some fixity of tenure, make the houses comfortable, and provide a little ground for recreation. It is generally calculated that such property should bring in, owing to its insecurity as an investment, at least 10 per cent. But Ruskin took 5 per cent., and spent the margin on improvements. At this time he had not developed his later heresies about the sinfulness of all usury. I will not go into that question, because it is a complicated one, and because Ruskin—as he often did—adopted a principle upon insufficient and inadequate grounds. He did not reflect that all interest is ultimately due to the multiplying power and the stored natural products of the earth, and that the basis of all increment is that you can dig things like coal out of the earth on the one hand, by which the available commodities of the earth are increased, and that if you sow a grain of wheat, a dozen grains are the result. The question is not of course as simple as that; but while it may be contended that all capital and all increment alike are the property of the

community, and ought not to be appropriated by any one individual, that is not the same thing as saying that all interest on capital received by private persons is wrong.

Ruskin had a very painful correspondence with Miss Octavia Hill at a later date, which is all printed in *Fors*. Some criticisms which she had made on his unpractical grasp of business vexed him, and he accused her of treachery, and of discouraging would-be adherents. She amply vindicated herself; but the gap was not bridged, though he ultimately parted with the whole of his small house property to Miss Hill, and ten years later frankly admitted his error. He tried too the experiment of a small tea and coffee shop, with a fantastic care of details, such as the painted sign and the old china jars in the window. The business paid its expenses and produced a fair profit. But it is difficult to say how much of this was due to Mr. Ruskin's prestige. Tolstoy, the Russian novelist, had a sharp lesson in this respect, when he found that a pair of very indifferent shoes, which he made in order that he might earn a wage by manual work, were kept under a glass case as curiosities to be shown to visitors. And then too Ruskin made an experi-

ment about his books. It must be remembered that his fortune was melting away like snow in a thaw. But he hated bad paper and bad print, he could not bear the system of discounts and trade commissions, so he withdrew his earlier works from circulation, and made it as inconvenient as possible for every one concerned to get the books, and as difficult as possible for any incidental profit to be made out of them. But the public has the art of scenting out and getting what it wants; and in spite of his precautions, the books were bought—indeed the profits which Ruskin received on his books gave him an income, when all his fortune was gone, of something like £4000 a year; so that he was a rich man to the end of his days. But it does not by any means follow that it was a fair trading arrangement; indeed, it was only made possible by his increasing popularity, and cannot be cited as an economic precedent.

And then at last he made his great experiment. He began in 1871 to ask for definite adherents to help him in carrying out his ideas in practice. His aim was to fight the spirit of commercialism, which he believed was at the root of half the prevalent evils. He wanted men and women to join

with him in a serious attempt to live a simple life —he never preached or practised asceticism in any form—to introduce higher aims and a taste for purer pleasures. He thought that the reclaiming of waste land might give employment and healthy work. He did not believe that political agitation would do anything; but thought that if all those who had held the same sort of creed as himself and owned the same hopes, would come out of their conventional position in a base and hide-bound society, the body thus created would become a force which would have to be reckoned with. His idea was a Socialistic one, that capital, the means and material of labour, should be in the hands of Government—that is in a central body to whom authority was to be delegated; and so he founded a company or Guild, the Guild of St. George, which was to hold property for the benefit of its members. Every member was to assent to a comprehensive little creed, and to do some sort of work for his living; to obey the authority of the officers of the Guild, and to contribute a tithe of his income to a central fund. The fund was to buy land for the members to cultivate; to have a common store of valuable property;

to prefer manual labour to machinery, to use wind and water power for mills and factories, not steam ; to give fair wages, to found museums, to train refined taste, and to give healthy opportunities of recreation. He amused himself with all sorts of detailed enactments, pretty absurd fancies, which brought discredit on the scheme. Thus no wine was to be drunk which was not ten years old, a new coinage was to be designed ; the members were to wear costumes indicative of their rank and occupation, and to wear jewels which were to be uncut, except agates.

Then he selected a comprehensive little library to include all that he thought it good for a man to read ; such books as the *Economicus* of Xenophon, for a manual of household life, and Gotthelf's *Ulric the Farmer*, from a French version which he loved, because his father had been used to read it alone to him as a boy.

He began by giving the Guild a tenth of his fortune, which was still a large one. The tithe came to £7000, and in three years the rest of the civilised world contributed £236. He took a cottage near Sheffield, and stored some fine things there, pictures and minerals. The first land held by the Guild was a farm of thirteen acres at

Abbeydale, near Sheffield, which was bought by the Guild and taken over by a knot of enthusiasts, who knew nothing of farming, but were earning a living in other ways. It was a ludicrous failure. They employed a bailiff, who absorbed the profits. The land, bought at nearly £200 an acre, proved worthless: it became a tea-garden, and Ruskin was roundly abused for the failure. Beside this, the Guild had a cottage at Scarborough, two acres of moorland at Barmouth, and a wood in Worcestershire. One or two local industries were started in the Isle of Man and in the Lakes, but the whole experiment was a failure, and not even a failure of the colossal and tragic kind, but a petty and dismal failure, so that one hardly knows whether to laugh or cry over it all, at its vast designs and beautiful outlines, and its very scrappy and grotesque performances.

We may ask why a man whose genius was so great, whose view of the world was so noble, whose principles were so just and in many ways so sensible, and whose influence was so potent, should have had to suffer this ghastly fiasco? Well, in the first place Ruskin mistook his powers and his opportunity. A prophet must be content to be a prophet. He must not claim

a close hold over details—those must grow up naturally out of his ideas when they are accepted. Many of Ruskin's ideas are taking shape and working themselves out on practical lines. But in addition to his ideas it must be remembered that he had in one sense a practical mind, in that he loved precision of detail in everything, and desired concrete expression of his dreams. But he did not fully grasp the principles of economics, and he did not understand human nature. He was lacking in imaginative sympathy. He could not believe that there were plenty of robust sensible and virtuous people in the world who did not value art at a pin's head, and who desired to be comfortable in a commonplace way. One may wish that human nature were different; one may love great ideas, and desire peace and beauty to prevail, and yet grasp the fact that all human beings are not built on the same lines. All the charming details of Ruskin's Utopia were simply an expression of his own pure and dainty preferences, and he made the mistake of wishing to impose them upon others, or rather of believing that people only required to be told what was beautiful to desire it. It was this intense and stubborn dogmatism,

this sense of rightness in his own tastes and preferences, that was at the root of all his bitter failures. By his glowing words and by his own pure example he was sowing seed fast. But he desired to see an immediate harvest, and this the prophet cannot hope for—or if he does hope for it, he is destined to horrible disappointment. To me the details of Ruskin's schemes are infinitely charming and pathetic; but I should resent any compulsion in such a matter, while the whole situation seems to me as unutterably tragic as any situation I know in literature or life. This sensitive high-minded enthusiastic man, lashing himself into frenzy at the sight of the brute forces of human stupidity and baseness, in all their awful strength and solidity, finding that human beings would neither be charmed nor caressed nor laughed nor scolded into agreement, is to me one of the most august and pathetic figures that it is possible to conceive—beyond the reach indeed of human imagination. One is thrilled and awed and harrowed by the tragedies of Shakespeare or the novels of Tolstoy. But the whole of Ruskin's works and letters are like a gigantic romance, with the difference that, instead of being conditioned

by the imagination of a novelist, they are a volume straight from the awful hand of God, where no obstacles are smoothed away by happy coincidences, no wrongs conveniently righted, but where one can see the fierce conflict of elemental forces with a single soul, as noble, as perceptive, as subtle, as delicate as any spirit which was ever linked to a human frame, fighting single-handed, in sorrow and despair, against all the harsh and strong facts of life—not only facts that wreck lives and darken homes, but the very facts that seem to make for contentment and delight. It is the dreadful bewilderment that comes of trying to see where and what God really is, and on which side He is fighting that makes the tragedy of the situation; and though the surface may be rippled by humour and absurdity, yet the scene, if one views it fairly, is like the picture drawn by Homer of Charybdis—the swiftly running tide, the shudder of the moving deeps, till in the spin and eddy of the roaring race, the depth is laid bare, and the earth herself appears, black with sand.

4

And here I will relate in a few words what was probably the central fact in Ruskin's life —a love that transformed itself from a paternal affection into a consuming passion ; a love which was for years the mainspring and comfort of his life, and the frustration of which not only cost him the deepest of all the sorrows he had to endure, but caused the strain under which his overburdened mind gave way. One must not look too closely into an episode like this ; but it was to such an extent the pivot of his life, it explained so much, it accounted for so much, that it must be known and it must be indicated.

It was in 1858 that it began. It was at Rheinfelden, in that year, that on a Sunday walk he gathered a purple orchis by the road-side, and on coming home took pencil in hand to sketch it. A trivial incident enough ! But it seems to have brought home to him the ugly rigidity and absurdity of his Sabbatarian training ; and he dated from that incident a train of thought which led to his abjuring his old Evangelical beliefs. A Sunday at Turin a few

weeks later, when he attended a little Protestant chapel of Waldensians, put the finishing touch. He heard the grim Puritan doctrines of Calvinism and Predestinarianism preached with a fierce unction, and the horror of it all came suddenly home to him. He left the chapel converted "inside out," as he said. When he reached home a few days later, in a very despondent frame of mind, he received a letter from a stranger in London, Mrs. La Touche, an Irishwoman, a half-sister of Lord Desart, asking if he could find time to give her three children a few lessons in drawing, and adding that she ventured to ask the favour because she believed him to be the only sound teacher of art. The frankness of the request took his fancy, and he went round to call, little thinking what was in store for him. This was his description of what happened: "Presently the drawing-room door opened and Rosie came in, quietly taking stock of me with her blue eyes as she walked across the room; gave me her hand as a good dog gives its paw, and then stood a little back. 'I thought you so ugly,' she told me afterwards. She didn't quite mean that; but only that her mother having talked much of my 'greatness' to her, she had

expected me to be something like Garibaldi or the Elgin Theseus; and was extremely disappointed."

Rose La Touche was undoubtedly a very charming and precocious child, extremely beautiful, full of lively fancies, with marvellous power of winning and returning love, with pretty half-mocking half-caressing ways, with a set of pet nicknames for the people round her; just the sort of child, with her wayward fancies and her lavish affection, to win the heart of a sorrowful and lonely man. He wrote, long after;—"Rose, in heart, was with me always, and all I did was for her sake." One of those relations grew up which are intensely moving to think of, and even to read of, but which can hardly bear to be spoken about, with all the silly pretty chatters, the little jokes and quarrels and reconciliations, that are too intimate to record, and yet which may play so intense a part in daily life. Some of the letters she wrote to him are preserved—indeed he carried her first letter to himself about with him for years, enclosed in thin plates of gold—and some of his letters to her are printed, in which one sees with irrepressible emotion how this man of middle-age, in the forefront

of the writers and workers of the day, poured out his heart and mind to the girl and depended on her sympathy and even her counsel. Such things cannot be quoted, but they are intensely moving, and to me even more than beautiful. She was a child of ten when they first met, and when she was eighteen the whole of Ruskin's power of devotion was centred upon her. He told her of his desire that she should become his wife, but she could give him no answer, and he agreed to wait till she was twenty-one. "Did you see the gleam of sunshine yesterday afternoon?" Ruskin wrote to Burne-Jones. "If you had only seen *her* in it, bareheaded, between my laurels and my primrose bank!" But she had no desire to change the old relation, and moreover, she had become deeply devout on the Evangelical lines which he had discarded. She published a little religious manual in 1873 called *Clouds and Light*, and when he asked her for answer, she told him frankly and sweetly enough that she could not marry an unbeliever.

He plunged into work to deaden thought. In the autumn of 1874 he heard that she was dying; her precocious intellect and her deep religious emotion had burnt the vital spark out. The

story used to be that he went off at once to her, but that she refused to see him unless he could say that he loved God better than herself, and this he would not say. But the story is not true. He saw her often, and was with her to the last. She died in 1875, and his heart was buried in her grave.

This is one of the little allusions he made to the end of his hopes, in a letter to some of his nearest friends:—

"I have just heard that my poor little Rose is gone where the hawthorn blossoms go—which I've been trying to describe all the morning—and can't get them to stay with me. . . . I have been long prepared, so you need not be anxious about me. But the tree branches look very black."

In 1874, before her illness, he wrote to his old friend Miss Beever: "I wanted my Rosie *here*. In heaven I mean to go and talk to Pythagoras and Socrates and Valerius Publicola. I shan't care a bit for Rosie there, she needn't think it. What will grey eyes and red cheeks be good for *there?*" That was it. He saw all round him others happy and blest in wedded love, refreshing their weary spirits and healing the hurts of combat in the quiet peace of home. Heaven seemed to

heap upon him the good things for which he did not care, and to deny him what he desired and needed most. Those who saw him surrounded by love and care, honoured and famous, rich and using his wealth generously for what was nearest to his mind, marvelled that he could still carry about with him a spring of secret sorrow —which indeed he did not allow to overflow, but which yet poisoned all his happiness. Few then guessed what it all meant, and how the distracted work in which he indulged, the irritable restlessness of brain and heart, were but his brave attempts to forget. We may lose ourselves in vain speculation as to what might have been the issue of it all, could he but have gained what he desired, or why so bitter a cup was forced to his lips. But that is the story, and not only cannot the influence of that love, which began so brightly and gaily under the tender lights and dews of dawn, and which waxed into so hot and broad a noon of passion, be overlooked and set aside; but it must rather be regarded as the one central fact of Ruskin's inner life: it revealed to him the worth and depth of love; and in its agony of disappointment, its sharp earthly close, it laid his spirit in the dust, and condemned him to a

solitude of pain, the secret significance of which perhaps came home to him in those hours of incommunicable musing, when the music of the world was dumb to him, and the light of beauty sickened and died on tower and tree.

LECTURE V

I

As life's sands ran out, and Ruskin's old equanimity of work declined, the range and sweep of his plans became more vast and wide. He wrote humorously in 1875:—

"I begin to ask myself, with somewhat pressing arithmetic, how much time is likely to be left me, at the age of fifty-six, to complete the various designs for which, until past fifty, I was merely collecting material. Of these materials I have now enough by me for a most interesting (in my own opinion) history of fifteenth-century Florentine Art, in six octavo volumes; an analysis of the Attic art of the fifth century B.C. in three volumes; an exhaustive history of northern thirteenth-century art, in ten volumes; a life of Sir Walter Scott, with analysis of modern epic art, in seven volumes; a life of Xenophon, with analysis of the general principles of education, in ten volumes; a commentary on Hesiod, with final analysis of the principles of Political Economy, in nine volumes; and a general description of the geology and botany of the Alps, in twenty-four volumes."

He lectured a good deal in this year, and studied Botany and Geology. But since the Christmas in Venice of which I have spoken, his writings took on a new tinge. He read the Bible more diligently, and like many men whose opinions have widened, felt its inspiration more deeply, as his reliance on its literal and verbal accuracy declined. At the same time he began to take up a distinctly antagonistic attitude to science and the conclusions of science. He did not shun the closest investigations of nature, but he thought that he was bound to protest against the increasing tendencies to materialism. He became in fact a mystic; his faith slipped from the bands of orthodoxy, and became very much what Carlyle's faith was, a vague but intense Theism, which recognised, as far as one can apply human terms to things so remote and abstruse, a mind, a purpose, a will at work behind nature and man. It is of course the insoluble enigma, the realisation of a power presumably all-originating and all-powerful, which is yet in a condition of combat, and appears to thwart its own designs. It is the old question of free-will in another shape. There is little logical ground for believing in free-will, and yet it is,

so far as experience and consciousness goes, the one indisputable fact of life. The difficulty of course is this. If God is the origin of all phenomena and all conditions, He must have imposed upon Himself limitations, because His law is not harmonious, but obstructs itself. The moral sense is at variance with the natural instinct. But for all that Ruskin's faith was firm, if it was not definite, and he put it in the forefront of his teaching. He wrote from Oxford :—

"I gave yesterday the twelfth and last of my course of lectures this term, to a room crowded by six hundred people, two-thirds members of the University, and with its door wedged open by those who could not get in ; this interest of theirs being granted me, I doubt not, because for the first time in Oxford I have been able to speak to them boldly of immortal life."

But it was a time of awful strain. His Rose was dying, and he could not pledge his belief even to her and to her dying prayers. Yet he opened his heart to many new friends. He became greatly attached to the Duke of Albany, then at Oxford, and went to stay at Windsor Castle with him. He visited Mr. Gladstone at Hawarden, and convinced himself that he had been wrong in ever doubting

his entire sincerity. He cancelled a passage he had written in *Fors* disparaging Mr. Gladstone's principles, and inserted a note in the blank space to say that the gap was a memorial of rash judgment. He also formed a close friendship with Mr. Gladstone's daughter Mary, now the widowed Mrs. Drew. But things were going with him from bad to worse. He felt the strain of his work, but could not rest. He wrote a touching letter about his sense of inadequacy and failure. It seems strange that a man who was becoming one of the foremost and most influential men in England should feel thus; and no doubt physical causes were largely responsible. But all his practical enterprises seemed to break down; and what he could neither see nor measure was the steady growth of his influence. He wrote:—

"My own feeling, now, is that everything which has hitherto happened to me, and been done by me, whether well or ill, has been fitting me to take greater fortune more prudently, and to do better work more thoroughly. And just when I seem to be coming out of school—very sorry to have been such a foolish boy, yet having taken a prize or two, expecting now to enter upon some more serious business than cricket, I am dismissed by the Master I hoped to serve, with a—'That's all I want of you, sir.'"

He was working at a catalogue of Turner's drawings, and at a number of *Fors*, little guessing that it would be the last he would write for seven dreary years; and he gave a very touching account of Turner's last days, and of the sense of failure and public indifference which embittered the great painter's later years. He spoke of Turner's youthful picture of Coniston, veiled in morning mists; and went on to tell of Turner's last prodigious efforts, and of how his "health, and with it in great degree his mind, failed suddenly, with a snap of some vital cord." And then he wrote the passage, the most beautiful and pathetic which he ever penned:—

". . . Morning breaks, as I write, along those Coniston Fells, and the level mists, motionless and grey beneath the rose of the moorlands, veil the lower woods, and the sleeping village, and the long lawns by the lake-shore.

"Oh that some one had but told me, in my youth, when all my heart seemed to be set on these colours and clouds, that appear for a little while and then vanish away, how little my love of them would serve me, when the silence of lawn and wood in the dews of morning should be completed; and all my thoughts should be of those whom, by neither, I was to meet more!"

Then, as suddenly, his friends became aware

that in him too the strain and the sorrow of his life had broken through the bulwarks, and invaded the inmost fortress of life and consciousness. His mind lost its balance. It was hoped at first that it was but a temporary affection, but it grew worse day by day, and after a time of horrible suspense to those about him, his sudden and dangerous illness was announced. The chief feature of his state was a continuous delirium, arising from some obscure inflammation of the tissues of the brain. Let me quote the beautiful and tender words of one of his nearest friends, Professor Collingwood, on the subject.

"Let such troubles of the past be forgotten: all that I now remember of many a weary night and day is the vision of a great soul in torment, and through purgatorial fires the ineffable tenderness of the real man emerging, with his passionate appeal to justice and baffled desire for truth. To those who could not follow the wanderings of the wearied brain it was nothing but a horrible or a grotesque nightmare. Some, in those trials, learnt as they could not otherwise have learnt to know him, and to love him as never before."

The affliction took him quite unawares. There had been definite premonitory symptoms. The only thing that might have shown him where he was drifting was rapid alternation of intense ex-

citement, accompanied by vivid dreams and unnatural restlessness, with periods of intense depression. And here I will say a few words about Ruskin's mental condition for the rest of his life. He is often spoken of as having been mad. That is not at all the case. He had no fixed delusion, no insane preoccupation.

He wrote, for instance, to Miss Gladstone about one of his attacks :—

"I find it will be quite impossible for me to come to Hawarden this autumn. I am very utterly sorry, and should only make you sorry for me if I were to tell you the half of the weaknesses and the worries which compel me to stay at home, and forbid all talking. The chief of all reasons being, however, that in my present state of illness, nearly every word anybody says, if I care for them, either grieves or astonishes me to a degree which puts me off my sleep, and off my work, and off my meat. I am obliged to work at botany and mineralogy, and to put cotton in my ears ; but you know one can't pay visits while one's climbing that hill of the voices, even if some sweet ones mingle in the murmur of them. I'm rather going *down* the hill than up just now, it's so slippery ; but I haven't turned—only slipped backwards."

Or again he wrote, at a later date :—

"If a great illness like that is quite conquered,

the return to the lovely world is well worth having left it for the painful time; one never knew what beauty was before (unless in happy love which I had about two hours and three-quarters of once in my life). I am really better now than for some years back, able every day for a little work, not fast, but very slow (second Præt. isn't out yet, I'm just at work on the eleventh chapter), and able to take more pleasure in things than lately.

For a good many years after this first attack of derangement and delirium, he had similar attacks, but never one so bad. They were generally heralded by the same excitement and the same depression; but when they were over, he returned rapidly and securely to his ordinary health; and indeed, as Professor Collingwood wrote, they passed over him like storm-clouds leaving a clear sky. Indeed he was in many ways happier and more tranquil in the intervals than he had been before. He knew perfectly well what had happened to him, that he had been, as it is called, out of his mind. But he spoke of it frankly and even humorously, and described his insane fancies. He never showed any morbidity about it, nor did it in any way affect his relation to his own circle or to his outside friends. It just came and

went as other illness might come and pass away. He had fallen ill in February. By May he was at work again. His friends, anxious to show their sympathy and esteem, bought Turner's great picture of the Splügen for 1000 guineas, and gave it him, to his great delight.

2

But there was a singular and notorious adventure just ahead of him. He had taken occasion in a number of *Fors* to dismiss the works of Mr. Whistler with a contemptuous paragraph.

I cannot here go into the main question. There can be no doubt that Whistler was in his way a very great artist, though a very unequal one. Some of his portraits are beyond praise. But it may be questioned whether his brilliant and impressionist experiments in colour in the pictures such as the Nocturnes, and in particular the Nocturne in Blue and Silver of old Battersea Bridge, which was produced in court, can be taken quite seriously. But art is one of those things about which it is impossible to argue. The pictures are beautiful in the eyes of trained critics, and have a mysterious suggestiveness. Their permanence cannot be foretold. The point

is that no tribunal can lay down whether a particular picture is great and good art, because so much depends upon its suggestive effect. One might as well have a lawsuit about a lyric of Tennyson's. On the other hand, in so far as the artist is a tradesman, he may be affected by a damaging statement of a critic, and deprived of his means of livelihood.

Ruskin it seems, before his illness, anticipated with unconcealed delight the prospect of the trial. He wrote or said to Lady Burne-Jones: "It's mere nuts and nectar to me, the notion of having to answer for myself in court, and the whole thing will enable me to assert some principles of art economy which I've never got into the public's head by writing; but may get sent all over the world vividly in a newspaper report or two." The words complained of were these. Ruskin had written that pictures ought not to have been admitted to the Grosvenor Gallery in which the ill-educated conceit of the artist so nearly approach the aspect of wilful imposture. "I have seen and heard much of cockney impudence before now, but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face." Ruskin was too ill

to be present at the trial, but Whistler gave his evidence with his unparalleled assurance and humour. He admitted that he had "knocked off" a Nocturne in two days. The Attorney-General said, "The labour of two days, then, is that for which you ask two hundred guineas?" "No," said Whistler, "I ask it for the knowledge of a lifetime."

Burne-Jones himself gave memorable evidence. Bowen asked him if he thought one of the Nocturnes a work of Art.

Burne-Jones.—"No, I cannot say that it is. It is only one of a thousand failures that artists have made in their efforts to paint night."

Bowen.—"Is that picture in your judgment worth two hundred guineas?"

Burne-Jones.—"No, I cannot say that it is, seeing how much careful work men do for much less. Mr. Whistler gave infinite promise at first, which he has not since justified. I think he has evaded the great difficulty of painting, and has not tested his powers by carrying it out . . . the danger is this, that if unfinished pictures become common, we shall arrive at a stage of mere manufacture, and the art of the country will be degraded."

Of old Battersea Bridge the Judge (Huddleston) said, "Are those figures on the top intended for people?"

Whistler.—"They are just what you like."

Judge.—"That is a barge beneath?"

Whistler.—"Yes, I am very much flattered at your seeing that."

The whole trial was merely farcical, and the jury gave a verdict in Whistler's favour, with damages one farthing. It is hard to see what else they could do but enter into the joke. Both sides had to pay their own costs, and Ruskin's friends subscribed to pay his, which came to £385. Whistler wrote to his solicitor to suggest that his own supporters should do the same, adding, "in the event of a subscription, I would willingly contribute my own mite." They were not subscribed for, and Whistler went through the bankruptcy court. It is said that he wore the farthing on his watch chain till the end of his life.

It is not a very dignified episode; and nothing can really justify the tone of arrogant and malicious contempt which Ruskin had used. It was a flash of his perverse and irritable dogmatism. He had cracked the literary whip so long and so loud, and so many whips had been cracked at

himself, that he had forgotten how much such flourishes might hurt.

But further than that, one cannot acquit Ruskin in the matter of having exhibited an evil and a tyrannical temper. He was a man of very great distinction, and he held a supreme and unassailed position in the world of art. Single-handed he had accomplished a great revolution; he had, like Mahomet, broken the old idols of the land, and he had established a new set of idols in their place. He must have known that his words would carry immense weight. If he had made the position of the Pre-Raphaelites secure, he ought to have reflected that he could do much to unmake the position of a single artist. And then the criticism was what the French call *saugrenu*—it was stupid, and it was expressed brutally and vindictively, considering the artists whom he had ignored and the strange medley of painters whom he had praised; considering too that there were great tracts of art of which he knew nothing, and that his life had been spent in discovering painters of unrecognised merit, the whole judgment was childish and petulant. At this very time he was exalting to the skies Miss Kate Greenaway, an artist who had no particular technical distinction,

but only a delightful knack of catching the charm of childhood.

It may be urged in excuse that he was at this time more conscious of failure than of success; that he was in a state of exasperated indignation against the prejudice and the indifference of the world about causes which he had passionately at heart. And then too he loathed the cynical levity, the touch of the mountebank which there undoubtedly was about Whistler. He could not believe that any great art could proceed from such a spirit. He was bound indeed by his own principles to believe and maintain this, though he had never taken the trouble to find out that those principles were not true. He could not see that there might co-exist in a character like Whistler's a great seriousness about art and a superficial irony about life. He felt with Burne-Jones that the point at issue was moral rather than artistic, and the facile impressiveness, the charming trickery of Whistler's art seemed to him wicked, pernicious and degrading. But the episode is intensely significant, because it tears away the veil of courtesy and humour and chivalry, the personal appeal which made Ruskin's attitude to human beings so touching and so

fascinating, and reveals the dogmatic and self-righteous spirit which was the root of all his troubles, and which I personally believe was the reason why he needed so heavy and persistent a chastening. The spirit of dogmatism, of intellectual and spiritual pride, is, I make no doubt, the most deadly and dangerous quality in the world. The old allegory of the fall of Satan and the rebel angels is a vehicle of the sternest and hardest truth, because it shows what is or may be the last and deepest fault of the purest and most exalted spirit. Ruskin was by nature a very noble and guileless character. His intellectual energy saved him from all grosser sins ; but he had, and it would be idle to conceal it, this one intolerable fault, which was hidden from him by the generosity and fineness of his enthusiasms. He knew he was right ; and though this gave much of what he said a great intensity and driving force, because there are so many natures in the world who are more desirous of being commanded than of being persuaded, yet when it over-brimmed the cup, it foamed itself away in rash and mistaken judgments, which stained and encumbered his message and left him weak and helpless. I look upon Ruskin's whole life as the exorcising and casting

out of that demon. If, as I hold, the character, the individuality, survives alike the memory and the mortal frame and the frailer elements, then one can see the need of this sad process of chastening and correcting; and not otherwise. No faith can have vitality or hope which does not hold that we are somehow the better for our failures and our falls, however much they may have devastated our life and influence, with whatever shame and self-reproach they may have wasted our days.

3

Few things are more unsatisfactory than descriptions of places one has not seen. A dozen scratches with a pen on a piece of paper would give you a better idea of Brantwood than a dozen elaborate paragraphs. That is a humiliating fact for a writer, and I have often wondered why it is that words are so vague and powerless. What is worse still, one is generally disappointed in the appearance of a place of which one has read an elaborate description. I am in hopes that some of you may some day take a pious pilgrimage to Brantwood, and it is such a beautiful place that I am not much afraid that you will be disappointed. You must imagine a long and rather

narrow lake—the lake of Coniston—it looks on the map like an elongated sausage—with low hills on either side. Suppose yourself going up the lake from the rather dreary and undulating country that lies between its southern end and the sea. About two miles from the upper end we will pause. At the head of the water lie the steep woods of larch and pine, of Monk Coniston; to the left is a little scattered village of stone or white rough-cast houses terraced up the slope. Above them rises the great mountain called the Old Man, and the ragged long-backed height of Wetherlam,—huge green hills, with rolling outlines, and outcrops of rock, their dark hollows and quiet folds full, as I have often seen them, of a soft golden haze.

On the right, under a long line of heathery fells, their skirts covered with larch-woods and oak-copses, about a hundred feet above the lake, the big irregular white house of Brantwood poises on the slope, with green meadows below it to the water's edge, commanding a wide view down the lake and across to the Old Man. The house lies embosomed in the thickets, among steep-hanging close-grown copses, with long stems intertwined, and mossy grass under foot, rich

in spring with daffodils and hyacinths. There are little climbing paths everywhere; many dashing streams descend from the moorland in pools and water-breaks, among moss-grown stones, and the heathery bluffs above are fenced from the wood by high stone walls.

The house was hardly more than a cottage when Mr. Ruskin first bought it, a damp and ramshackle little place belonging to Linton the engraver. He bought it for £1500, without even going to see it, and it cost him several thousand pounds to make it comfortable. It stands on a platform partly hollowed out of the rock behind; and the rooms which Mr. Ruskin added tower up behind the old low front. So steep is the fall of the ground that the big studio at the back of the house, four storeys up, has a door which opens on the wood above. The whole place has always to me a half-Italian air about it, like a villa among the chestnut woods of the Apennines. You approach it by a steep little carriage drive, embowered in rhododendrons. As the house extended itself backwards into the hill, it swallowed up the ground space where a carriage could turn; and so by an ingenious arrangement the drive passes under the back of the house itself, through

a great stone-arched passage, very Italian in plan. It is all plain rough-cast, with square windows, and slated with thick blue country slate. The comfort of it is that there is no attempt whatever at style or taste; it is a house to live in, not to look at. The only signs of Gothic about it are a rather cockneyfied octagonal turret at one corner, built to secure a wide view over the lake, and a row of little Gothic windows, with red stone facings, in the dining-room added by Mr. Ruskin. It has all the pleasing irregularity of a big house which has grown out of a small one, full of endless passages and steep little staircases. When I last visited it, Mrs. Severn, to whom it now belongs, kindly allowed me to explore the whole domain, and I was taken round by Baxter, Ruskin's valet, a cheerful bald ruddy Irishman, who had the rare art of showing me what I wanted to see without appearing ever to have taken a visitor round before.

The whole place is extraordinarily simple and comfortable; only gradually does one realise the amazing splendour and rarity of the pictures which adorn the house. It is kept almost exactly as it was when Ruskin died ten years ago, and I suppose that the pictures must be worth over

a hundred thousand pounds. I cannot say what an impression of what the Romans called *pietas*, reverential affection and tenderness, it gives to see the place preserved with such loving care. To put it as plainly as I can, the locking-up of so valuable a treasure of art, which could be so easily dispersed, in so simple and unquestioning a spirit, merely in order to leave the shrine of a great man's life untouched, is an evidence of a loyalty as rare as it is noble.

Let me give you two instances. The dining-room contains a great Titian, a Tintoretto, a portrait of Raffaelle, probably painted by himself, a portrait of Reynolds as a boy, by himself, a portrait of Turner as a boy, by himself.

But more moving still is the sight of Ruskin's bedroom, just as it was. A tiny room, with one window, an ugly grey paper, drugget on the floor; a heavy clumsy mahogany bed and old-fashioned mahogany furniture; a big book-shelf of well-used readable books, poetry, novels, and biographies; and on the walls, in very ordinary frames, hung close together, some twenty of the most magnificent Turner water-colours in the world—and among them a little dreary water-colour painting by old Mr. Ruskin, of

Conway Castle, about which his father used to tell Ruskin a story every morning when he used as a little boy to come in before breakfast to watch papa shaving.

That is a moving place, that little room, haunted, alas, with very heavy and shadowy fears and sorrows, sacred if any room is sacred, not to be visited with light-hearted curiosity, but with the reverence due to the sufferings of a noble spirit. When Mrs. Severn first took me there, some years ago, her kind eyes filled suddenly with tears which she did not even try to dissemble, and I am not ashamed to say that I was no less moved, for I knew what her thoughts must be.

Down below is the little low-ceiled study, where Ruskin worked, sitting at a round table in the bow that looks out upon the lake and the mountains. It was there that he penned those intensely pathetic words that I have quoted, the last he wrote before he sank into the long seven years' silence.

The room itself has the same air of comfort, almost bourgeois cosiness, which is so strong a note of the house. The mahogany chairs are upholstered in a vivid emerald green; there is

a writing-table, which used every noon to be covered with letters set out to dry, for Ruskin used no blotting-paper. There are great presses for sketches and manuscripts and minerals; endless pictures of his own, in stacks: it is evidently the room of a very hard-working and industrious man, who needed to refer to many papers, and to have them in perfect order close at hand. But anything more wholly unæsthetic, more unlike the perverted idea of Ruskin cannot be conceived; domestic peace and convenient simplicity are the notes of the place. As the old valet said to me, showing me a great mass of sketches and notes, filling a pile of cardboard boxes, made for the *Stones of Venice*—"Yes, he was the most industrious man I ever saw in my life, was the Professor!"

There are three pictures in the house which I saw with great emotion. One a fine water-colour of Ruskin by Richmond, when he was twenty-eight. It represents him as a slim and graceful man, in white duck trousers strapped beneath elegant boots, leaning forward as he sits, with a crayon in his hand. His wavy hair, his bright complexion, his blue eyes have an air of combined sweetness and confidence which is

very engaging; you feel in the presence of a charming, buoyant and very positive young man, full of enjoyment and delight, and quite capable of telling all the world what to enjoy and admire.

Then there is a little sketch, by himself, of himself at the age of fifty—the same face, a little dimmed and sharpened by life, but with an air of vitality and alertness, though possibly a touch of primness and downrightness about it.

Then there is the grand picture of him not long before the end, by Mr. Severn. The hair is shot with silver, and he has a long flowing white beard. The beard greatly improved the solemnity and benevolence of his look. His mouth had been injured by the bite of a dog when he was a child, and had always a somewhat pugnacious expression.

As Burne-Jones once wrote:—

"The hair that he has grown over his mouth hides that often angry feature, and his eyes look gentle and invite the unwary, who could never guess the dragon that lurks in the bush below."

But Ruskin had no illusions about his own appearance. He wrote to M. Chesneau in 1883:—

"Alas, those photographs you read so subtly are not worth your pains. The *Barbe de Fleuve*

only came because I was too ill to shave; and all the rest of the face is saddened and weakened by anger, disappointment, and various forms of luxury and laziness. . . . Carpeaux's would have been beautiful, had he been fortunate in his youth; mine would have been stronger had I been *un*fortunate—*in good time!*"

The eyes of the portrait are still blue and smiling, and the complexion has still that porcelain clearness which comes of temperate living and pure thoughts. But such a look of patience and sadness in the wide-open eyes and great drooping eyebrows! He sits sunk down in a chair, looking up and out, as though there was indeed a dawn of peace behind the cloud, of which he saw the first faint radiance.

Yet it would be a great mistake to connect only mournful or tragic memories with Brantwood. It was indeed, as Carlyle said of Fox How, Dr. Arnold's house not many miles from Coniston, "a temple of industrious peace." Sorrowful and in a sense embittered as the drift of Ruskin's thought was, he had a great power of recuperation and of immersing himself in his work. He was probably happier than he knew; and it is hardly possible to have a more beautiful picture of happy and serious domestic life than that lived by the circle at

Brantwood. His cousin Joanna and her husband Arthur Severn, lived with him. The latter is an accomplished artist and a man of great social charm, while Mrs. Severn is, as I have said, one of the people who, by reason of extraordinary unselfishness, great practical power, devoted affection, and humorous perception, radiate a kind of happiness about them; their children were born and grew up at Brantwood, so that Ruskin had all the interests and affections of an almost patriarchal circle. Then there were great friends close at hand. The Miss Beevers, who lived at the head of the Lake, were clever, simple-minded, active and sympathetic women, whose relations with Mr. Ruskin were sisterly rather than neighbourly. Some of his most beautiful and intimate letters were written to them. Then the whole establishment was of a tribal type—the servants were as much friends as servants; and Ruskin by his personal charm had a way of establishing friendly relations with simple people. He would visit the village school to talk to the children, and his letters are full of stories of the interests and sayings of the girls, rather perhaps than of the boys, of the farmers and herdsmen in the fells. As life went on he became more tranquil—but he had always

lived rather a dual life, the life of lonely reverie and a social life as well, in which he just put aside his private cares and displayed all his incomparable variety and charm of talk. He was very fond of showing his treasures to interested listeners; and the discursiveness of mind which made his later public writings so hard to follow was an added charm in his conversation. The people who came in a solemn mood to Brantwood, as if they were going to sit at the feet of a prophet like Elijah in a cleft of the rocks, had the nonsense taken very quickly out of them at finding a courteous English gentleman in the middle of a very cheerful family circle, and were almost scandalised when the Professor, as he was called, instead of indulging in scathing diatribes on the luxury and selfishness of the age, spent the evening in joining with more energy than skill in the chorus of a nigger melody, or clapping his hands with convulsions of laughter at some topical comic song. A pompous disciple who called at Brantwood and went away appalled at his hero's levity, said sorrowfully afterwards to his friends: "It was a great disappointment to find that he is no true Ruskinian." One little tradition which I heard on the spot is so amusing that I cannot

refrain from repeating it here. It was on the occasion of one of his later birthdays, when a large deputation of his admirers, without giving any notice of their intention, appeared at the front door of Brantwood, sang a kind of serenade to their idol, and then requested to see him. Mr. Ruskin was unwell, and not in a very benevolent mood. However, he appeared, and the solemn disciple who had charge of the proceedings came forward, and in language which he believed to be appropriate to the taste of the prophet, said, "Master, was not that a right jocund strain?" Mr. Ruskin replied, "I am afraid I do not know anything about that, and I am sure I am very much obliged to you; but I have a particular desire to be left alone, and so I will wish you a very good morning."

It has been sometimes alleged with extraordinary absurdity that Ruskin was a *poseur*. He had of course just as much of the quality as is necessary for a man whose work is that of a writer and lecturer and controversialist. He liked to express his opinion, and he had no objection to expressing it in public. If you hold very strong views on many matters of public concern, and if you think it important that

other people should adopt your views, you naturally wish to express them as effectively as possible, and you use the arts which all public performers must condescend to. But Mr. Ruskin never did condescend to use public arts, except the arts of the accomplished pugilist. He was a hard hitter of amazing dexterity. But he did not hold or express his opinions because he wished to enhance his own impressiveness or his own fame. Indeed, for years and years he risked a very secure fame for the sake of unpopular causes and visionary schemes; and he had a very strong sense of his claim to independence, and his right to live his life on his own lines.

And the life he loved was the kind of life he lived at Brantwood—simple, comfortable, and sociable. He saw a great number of visitors, and he was not in the least troubled by inconvenient shyness. There was a perpetual succession of guests of every kind; and his work over—it was all done as a rule by the time of the midday meal—he spent the rest of the day in simple domestic recreations. He was fond of woodmanship. His soft hat, his hedging-gloves and his chopper were very characteristic

signs of his presence, as they lay on the hall table. There was a carpentering woodshop, for framing and modelling; a little fleet of boats lay in the miniature harbour, the pier of which was built by the young men who assisted him in translating Xenophon. There were innumerable pet animals all about. Geological studies were always proceeding. There were experiments going on on the hill for reclaiming waste land; there were all sorts of wells and watercourses contrived in the copse for the moorland streams: heather and fern were rooted up, and the scanty soil prepared for a crop of oats, with the result that in the next heavy rains not only were the oats carried away, but the very field itself, leaving nothing but the bare stone hill behind.

And at home he was always willing to read aloud, to play chess, to talk. Let me add another little anecdote. There came one day a distinguished American to stay at Brantwood. To the surprise of the party he became very ill at ease at dinner, and appeared to be labouring under grave distress of mind; but as the evening went on he recovered his spirits. However, the thing had been so marked

that Mrs. Severn, with simple courtesy, asked him if anything had occurred to vex him. He smiled rather awkwardly, and said, "Yes, I was distressed at dinner to hear, as I thought, our venerable host spoken of before his face as 'the cuss,' which is an undignified and rather disagreeable term of our own." The fact was that Ruskin was in his own circle often called by the old abbreviation of the word cousin —'the coz'—which need hardly have disturbed the sensibilities of his guest.

4

And now I shall ask your leave to give a brief account of my one deeply treasured sight of Ruskin. I was a boy at Eton, near the top of the school. Everything was done in a curiously independent fashion at Eton in those days. I was President of a Literary Society which held meetings; but instead of our lectures being arranged by the authorities, the matter was left wholly to ourselves. We invited our lecturers, and left them, with the cheerful indifference of youth, to shift wholly for themselves. Sometimes we quartered them on a friendly master, sometimes we left them to pro-

vide their own dinner and bed. On taking office I wrote to half-a-dozen of the most eminent men in England, requesting them to come down and lecture to us. They must have thought it very odd to be invited by a schoolboy, but perhaps they did not wholly dislike it. At any rate they most of them accepted. Ruskin was a mere name to me in those days. I had perhaps turned over a volume or two of his works, and I expect thought them of little merit. Anyhow, he wrote to say he would come, and that he would lecture on Amiens. And then I think I had half-a-dozen of his letters, very friendly and charming, sending packets of drawings and plans which were to be put in the library to be looked at beforehand. I did not put them in the library, and I doubt if I even acknowledged the letters. We used to manage or mismanage the whole affair, fill the library with chairs, which were the property of the Society, and issue the tickets. I became aware that the proceedings were going to be of some importance, from the extreme anxiety on the part of masters and masters' wives to get tickets. And I had several invitations transmitted to me to be sent on to Mr. Ruskin, for him to dine

and sleep—one in particular from the Headmaster. These I sent on to him, but he declined them all. He said he would drive over in the course of the evening, and must go away again when the lecture was over; and that he would like a quiet room to sit in for a short rest before the lecture; but that he was ill, and could not bear the strain of society. I appealed to the Headmaster; he arranged to have a fire in a room called Chambers, in College, where Master's meetings were held, and where he interviewed offenders; and he said he would send in a cup of coffee for Ruskin. I thought no more of the matter. About an hour before the meeting, I got a message from the Matron to the effect that a gentleman wished to see me. I went down, and there standing in the Matron's room was the great man himself. I can see him as if it were yesterday. He was slim in form, but much bowed. He was clean-shaven then, and wore his hair rather long; his whole dress was very old-fashioned to my eyes. He was dressed in evening clothes, and I remember his low-cut waistcoat, his high-collared coat, the long linen cuffs that came half over his hands, his white gloves. He had

with him bundles of papers, and I remember the piercing look of his eyes. He looked worn and melancholy—he was on the verge of a bad illness—but his manner was delightfully courteous and natural. I took him to Chambers, and he asked me to sit down for a few minutes and talk. He seated himself in the Headmaster's chair with his elbows on the arms, sipped his coffee, and asked me some questions. He was vexed, I remember, to find that I had not put his pictures in the library, and expressed his vexation rather pettishly; but he talked on very gently and kindly, asked me about the Society and about the books we read—and I remember the pleasure which he expressed when he found I had read the whole of Walter Scott; then he said suddenly that he must rest. It appeared to me rather an affectation at the time. I did not know the meaning of the word tired, except in connection with football, and imagined older people to be impervious to all such weaknesses. I can see the look of him as I left the room, with his face bowed down over his hand. Then I came back to fetch him just before the lecture; and then I shall never forget the clear and beautiful tones of his expressive voice, and the

first lovely paragraph which now stands at the beginning of one of his books. The lecture was quite informal. Indeed, for the only time in his life, he had forgotten to bring his MS. Sometimes he read a few words, sometimes he talked; and he grew animated every now and then, though at first he had seemed weary and ill at ease. At the end he said a few words in reply to a vote of thanks, shook hands with a few friends, and gave me a little sign with his head. I walked out with him. There was a closed carriage at the door. He asked me to see that the papers were put in the library for reference, said a very cordial good-bye, and drove quickly away.

LECTURE VI

I

By 1881 Ruskin had apparently recovered his health. Then he had another brain attack, but emerged with renewed vigour, and found abundance of new things to say.

"The moment I got your letter to-day," he wrote to an old friend, "recommending me not to write books . . . I took out the last proof of last *Proserpina* and worked for an hour and a half on it; and have been translating some St. Benedict material since, with much comfort and sense of getting—as I said—head to sea again." He took a long tour abroad, and finally was able to resume his Professorship. Sir W. B. Richmond retired in his favour. The result was a more extraordinary concourse of listeners than ever. He lectured on the Art of England. But though his lectures contained some wonderful criticism, and some beautiful eloquence—there is a splendid and well-known

passage on the art of Rossetti—yet he seemed to have lost the power of connected thought; he disconcerted his hearers too by producing the sketches of amateur artists, and declaring that no hand like them had been put to paper since Lippi and Lionardo. At a lecture, for instance, given in Kensington he said: "I have never until to-day dared to call my friends and my neighbours together to rejoice with me over my recovered good or rekindled hope. Both in fear and much thankfulness I have done so now; yet not to tell you of any poor little piece of upgathered silver of my own, but to show you the fine gold which has been strangely trusted to me, and which before was a treasure hid in a mountain field in Tuscany." This majestic encomium was simply to introduce some pen-and-ink drawings by a gifted amateur, Miss Alexander, authoress of the *Roadside Songs of Tuscany*.

But his excitability was after this date a dangerous and trying symptom of his condition. A salient instance is his reply to a question addressed to him by the Liberal party at Glasgow University, when he was asked in 1880 to stand for the Lord Rectorship. He was asked

the plain question whether he was a supporter of Lord Beaconsfield or Mr. Gladstone. He replied :—

"What, in the devil's name, have *you* to do with either Mr. D'Israeli or Mr. Gladstone? You are students at the University, and have no more business with politics than you have with rat-catching. Had you ever read ten words of mine with understanding, you would have known that I care no more either for Mr. D'Israeli or Mr. Gladstone than for two old bagpipes with the drones going by steam, but that I hate all Liberalism as I do Beelzebub, and that, with Carlyle, I stand, we two alone now in England, for God and the Queen."

And I may here perhaps add the famous letter which he once wrote in reply to a request that he would subscribe to pay off a debt on a chapel at Richmond :—

"SIR,—I am scornfully amused at your appeal to me, of all people in the world the precisely least likely to give you a farthing! My first word to all men and boys who care to hear me is 'Don't get into debt. Starve and go to heaven—but don't borrow. Try first begging,—I don't mind, if it's really needful, stealing! But don't buy things you can't pay for!'

"And of all manner of debtors, pious people building churches they can't pay for are the

most detestable nonsense to me. Can't you preach and pray behind the hedges—or in a sandpit—or a coal-hole—first?

"And of all manner of churches thus idiotically built, iron churches are the damnablest to me.

"And of all the sects of believers in any ruling spirit—Hindoos, Turks, Feather Idolaters, and Mumbo Jumbo, Log and Fire worshippers, who want churches, your modern English Evangelical sect is the most absurd, and entirely objectionable and unendurable to me! All which they might very easily have found out from my books—any other sort of sect would!—before bothering me to write it to them.

"Ever, nevertheless, and in all this saying, your faithful servant,

"JOHN RUSKIN."

But he could not understand why his vehemence should be resented, or ridiculed—"the moment I have to scold people they say I am crazy," he said pathetically. The end of his public life was not far off. He struggled through his Oxford lectures, and was prevailed upon to give some readings of his previous works in the place of three rancorous and rambling discourses which he had prepared. He continued to work feverishly and unwisely, taking up one thing after another and dropping them in turn. A vote was passed at Oxford to

endow a physiological laboratory and vivisection; he resigned his Professorship at once, and left Oxford for ever. He was persuaded to begin his autobiography, to put together scattered fragments of early reminiscences which had appeared in *Fors*, and this for a time restored him to tranquillity. The result is, as I have said, one of the most beautiful books he ever wrote, *Præterita*, in which, apart from all controversy and schemes of reform, he traced in limpid and delicious sentences the memories of his childhood. The stream had run clear at last, and the book must stand for ever as one of the finest monuments of tender reminiscence with the dew of the morning and of the evening upon it. And he showed too in his book an art so perfect as to be absolutely oblivious of itself, issuing in what seems an ingenuous ecstasy of pure presentment.

But he was not able to finish it; he had planned out the whole book. He went down to Seascale and tried to work. "But now he seemed," says Professor Collingwood, "lost among the papers scattered on his table; he could not fix his mind upon them and turned from one subject to another in despair, and yet patient and kindly to those with him whose help he could no longer use, and

who dared not show—though he could not but guess it—how heartbreaking it was." So he put it all aside, and wrote one last chapter to record the truest companionship of his life, "Joanna's Care."

The clouds swept down on him again. And at last he saw that his work was done. He was seventy, and he had more volumes to his credit than any living English writer. He determined to wait for the end, little guessing how long that waiting would be; he steadily refused every kind of work or mental exertion, and was rewarded for it by a tranquillity of life and spirit such as he had never before enjoyed. He attended to a little business, dictated a few letters, and even allowed his early poems to be reprinted. He had now given away the whole of his capital, and his only income was from his books, but that was a large one, and enabled him to live as he wished, and to exercise a large generosity as well. Honour came to him—strangely ironical rewards—and there now grew up about him a mysterious reverence, for men began to see through the vehemence and the fury of his later expression, to realise how purely and generously he had lived, how loftily he had schemed and thought, and how

great was his legacy to the world. His eightieth birthday was the signal for a great outburst of praise and congratulations—flowers, letters, telegrams, addresses poured in. But he was past caring for such things. He crept about quietly, strolled in the open air, had a few letters read to him, and even indicated replies. He spoke little. Mr. Gordon Wordsworth, the grandson of the poet, has told me how in these latter days he used to go to see the old man. He was received in silence with a warm handshake and a smile. He would begin to talk about anything which he thought might interest Ruskin, particularly about foreign travel. "You can imagine how I felt," he said, "ventilating my extremely crude ideas about pictures and buildings to the great art-critic." Ruskin used to nod and smile—and then suddenly he would kindle into definite interest, and let fall some quiet criticism or memorable dictum. His mind seemed as strong as ever, but remote, lost in some incommunicable dream, and not easily to be recalled. There was no trace of delusion or wandering intellect; only he could not be roused. He seemed, said Professor Collingwood, "like the aged Queen Aud in the saga, who rose late and went to bed early,

and if any one asked after her health, she answered sharply."

Of Mr. Ruskin's closing years at Brantwood Professor Collingwood gives us some touching pictures in his *Life*. I will content myself with the following extract:—

"Walking out had become a greater weariness to him, and he had to submit to the humiliation of a bath-chair. To save himself even the labour of creeping down to his study, he sat usually in the turret-room upstairs, next to his bed-chamber, but still with the look of health in his face, and the fire in his eyes quite unconquered. He would listen while Baxter (his valet) read the news to him, following public events with interest, or while Mrs. Severn or Miss Severn read stories, novel after novel; but always liking old favourites best, and never anything that was unhappy. Some pet books he would pore over, or drowse over, by the hour. The last of these was one in which he had a double interest, for it was about ships of war, and it was written by the kinsman of a dear friend. Some of the artists he had loved and helped had failed him or left him, but Burne-Jones was always true. One night, going up to bed, the old man stopped long to look at the photograph from Philip Burne-Jones's portrait of his father. "That's my dear brother Ned," he said, nodding good-bye to the picture as he went. Next night the great artist died, and of all the many losses of these later years this one was the hardest to bear."

His life just touched the last year of the century. On the 20th of January 1900, after an attack of influenza, he suddenly failed, and fell softly asleep as the sunset came out beyond the fells.

He was buried at Coniston; and perhaps of all the tributes he received in death the truest and best was a little wreath of common flowers sent by the local tailor, with the words inscribed: "There was a man sent from God, and his name was John."

2

Let me try then in a few words, now that I have painted the outer portrait of the man, to sketch the inner portrait of the spirit, which is a far older and a far more lasting thing than the mortal body in which for a few years it is bound Ruskin came into the world gifted with the most intense power of ocular perception and observation. That runs through his whole work. In his delightful autobiography you can read how the little boy, with no toys to speak of, spent hours in counting the bricks of the opposite house-fronts, and tracing the patterns of the carpet on which he crawled; and how delightful to him was the sight of the pure stream of water, that rose so mysteriously from

the ground when the water-cart man unlocked the springs with his key, and filled his wheeled tank. And thus Ruskin kept all his life long the power of looking into things and seeing their smallest details; so that when he says that he sees this and that in a picture, which it is impossible for ordinary eyes to detect, we may at least be sure that he had looked longer at what he is describing than we are ever likely to do, and with a patience, as a German critic once wrote, that verges upon frenzy. And beside that he had an intense and sensuous pleasure in forms and curves, in tints and colours; across the texture of the world, which seems so meaningless to some of us, his swift brain traced subtle outlines and viewless perspectives: and for him too the whole of a scene flushed and glowed in a way that we perhaps can hardly comprehend, or lost itself in weft of opalescent mist and shadows of ethereal tincture. The vocabulary of colour is employed from end to end by Ruskin, and never either vaguely or imaginatively. And then too he had the same sort of an eye for words, so that the very winds and skies of earth breathed themselves into music. That was his outfit. But beyond all that he had a brain of incredible agility, which leapt in a flash from what was beautiful to what

was stern, and, we may be thankful, from what was solemn to what was humorous. There is seldom any strain or tension about his writing; for he relieves it almost instinctively just when the pressure becomes acute, by a swift turn of irony or pathos which refreshes the spirit.

He suffered perhaps as much as he gained from the extremely secluded character of his life. But I think his guarded childhood and boyhood were probably a benefit to him. He did indeed concentrate his energies too much; but he came into the larger world, in spite of his inner dogmatism, with a curiously beautiful sort of humility, an eager desire to win, and a courtesy which made him always put out his powers. Some one once said of him that it was the most touching thing in the world to see Ruskin, when he was already a well-known man, being snubbed and bidden to hold his tongue by his old mother, and the gracious sweetness with which he obeyed. But above all things he had a temperament which is called, and with what mistaken depreciation I will not stop to consider, a feminine temperament. It meant in Ruskin's case an extreme sensitiveness, an intense desire to be in affectionate and emotional

contact with his circle; a pretty touch of vanity, which was all the more harmless because he so constantly confessed it and deplored it; a great love of quiet, well-ordered, cosy ways of life, and a generosity that was never ashamed of confessing its fault with tears. His letters, in their tenderness, their emotional quality, their caressing fondness, are such as many a bluff and sensible man may despise and dislike. But for all that it is that kind of secret current of affection that sets from father to child, from brother to sister, from friend to friend, which binds up the wounds of the world and makes renunciation a more beautiful thing even than success.

And then—because I do not mean this to be a flattering portrait—there was in him what I have already described, a real, deep-seated, hard belief in his own absolute rightness and justice; and I do not disguise it. The greatest men of all have seen clearly enough the eternal distinction between right and wrong, generous and mean, kindly and cruel. But they have lost themselves more in sorrow than in anger at the poison of sin, and have seen the beautiful creature which lies, we dare to hope, within

the foulest and most ugly human manifestation. But Ruskin did not look deep enough for that. He talked too much about scolding and punishing people. As Lady Ambrose says in the *New Republic*, at the conclusion of Mr. Herbert's great harangue :—

"What a dreadful blowing-up Mr. Herbert gave us last night, didn't he? Now that, you know, I think is all very well in a sermon; but in a lecture, where the things are supposed to be taken more or less literally, I think it is a little out of place."

It is this, it may frankly and sorrowfully be confessed, that spoils much of his work—the implication that if you do not agree with him you are certainly stupid and probably vicious. Some have said that he learnt this from the Puritanism of his father and mother, and their contempt for weak-minded and disorderly people —but it is something far deeper than that. It might have been a little fostered in the still atmosphere of his childhood, by the sight of a father and mother, whom he knew to be kind and just, claiming to be so certain in their condemnations. But if he had not had a taste for fault-finding himself, he would have

grown to recoil from it all the more at the nearer touch of it—for in the lives of great men it is true to say that they often grow great, so to speak, by contraries, and learn from early influences quite as much what to mistrust as what to admire. I have often wondered whether in those last broken years of silence and musing, he was not often being sorry in a childlike way for his great fault, his own great fault, and perhaps in that happy penitence which is the joy of the angels. I would not make light of this harsh strain in him, and if in a sense it was the blemish in his mind, it was at least the cause of the heavenly and noble struggle which he fought out day by day.

But no one could have gathered round him, as Ruskin did, the almost passionate affection, in which there was always something of compassion, of so many wise and noble men and women; and one can forgive, with that sort of forgiveness that is three parts admiration, a fault which after all was lit by generous fires, and which was the shadow cast upon his words and deeds by the blaze of spirit with which he loved all that was true and pure and beautiful.

3

Now in dealing with this strange and beautiful life, so sharply divided into sadness and delight, this character at once so noble and so narrow, so intense and yet so yielding, I want to leave one point very clearly in your minds. The interest of Ruskin's life is the interest of a personality, and I want you to try to regard him in that light, and not either as prophet, or a reformer, or an art-critic, or a writer. He was all these things by turns—they were but the guises which this restless and ardent temperament assumed. As a prophet, he was unbalanced and unconvincing, because he had depth rather than width of view. He did not see the whole problem. He saw clearly enough into the hearts of like-minded people, but he was essentially a partisan, and condemned what he did not understand as severely as he condemned what he hated. He took, from his education and his sheltered life, a meagre view of the world. He had little sympathy with robust strength, and wide tracts of human nature, at its bluntest and soundest, were entirely obscure to him. And thus his reprobation was so extravagant that it made no appeal, not even the appeal

of shame and terror, to those whom he inveighed against most fiercely. Then too he did not even do justice to his age; he overlooked one of the best and strongest forces of the time—the resolute search for truth, the stern determination of the scientific spirit not to generalise till it has investigated. He went wrong himself in every department of his work, from his passion for generalisation and his acquiescence in incomplete investigation. What made his protests ineffectual was that he believed himself to have a perfectly analytical mind. His mind was indeed analytical, when he applied it to questions which he understood, and to workers with whom he sympathised. But he had no notion of just comparison, and when his sympathy was not enlisted he could not even analyse. He had the power of putting vague personal preferences into language superficially exact, and this was a terrible snare to him and to his followers, who believed that they were getting logical reasons when they were only getting instinctive predilections. Yet I am far from saying that as a prophet his work was thrown away. He was no ascetic, as I have said, and thus he was able to see the dangers of the materialism that is not uplifted by the concurrence of the soul. But he

felt that the invariable comfort in which he lived to some extent invalidated his message. "If I had lived in a garret," he once wrote, "then I could have preached that Queen Victoria should do the same." But as I have said before, he accepted with a sort of unquestioning loyalty the precise standard of material luxury in which he had been himself brought up, and he regarded any extension or development of this as base and degrading. Yet he was here in the main right, because he saw that the bane of the age is its impatience of simplicity, its worship of success, its preference of comfort, and its mistaking the quality of pleasure.

As a reformer he made even worse shipwreck partly because he was but little acquainted with the precise condition of affairs which he undertook to reform, and partly because he tried to impose his own private and quite unimportant tastes upon the persons whom he claimed as disciples. The men as a rule who have made disciples, and have worked out an ideal of practical life, like Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, Ignatius Loyola, have been men who on the one hand claimed and practised an abnegation of conventional comforts—a process which

has a very distinct pleasure for human beings—but whose consistency, personal charm, and authoritativeness sustained and rewarded their followers. But Ruskin made no sweep of comforts, no simplification of conditions; he merely attempted to forbid the luxuries for which he had no taste, while his consistency was incomplete and his task for personal authority small. He had not the gift of making his personal approval the one supreme reward coveted by his followers—he could not exalt himself into a little Deity; and thus he was called Master mainly by men who were not in personal touch with him. He said once, "No true disciple of mine can ever be a Ruskinian. He will follow not me, but the instincts of his own soul and the guidance of his Creator." But for all that, though he had not the gift of the maker of definite institutions, we must not make the mistake of underestimating his work as a reformer. He did see into the weakness of Commercialism, and he grasped the fact that the only real socialism must be based on individualism. He saw that the mechanical theory of labour and of trade competition was essentially degrading, because it did not evoke the gifts of the individual, and rewarded shrewdness rather than

industry. And here he threw his whole weight into the right scale. His grasp of economical details was unsound, but his insight into true economical principles was clear enough, because he saw that the mistake made was to treat it all as an exact and pure science, instead of a science which must take account of psychological principles.

As an art-critic he certainly established a new tradition, and the very narrowness of his technical knowledge was probably one of the conditions of his success. He was dealing with a nation which is not innately artistic, which has a mild and rather pathetic desire to care for art, a nation which can produce, in painting, landscapes of extraordinary beauty and portraits of wonderful animation and delicacy, but which has failed in most other kinds of delineation. And in architecture, which was his other great province, he was dealing with a nation which once, it seems, possessed a tradition of its own, and a power of designing great buildings, but which had lost its firmness of conception and originality of design, and had become little more than an accomplished copyist, or an ingenious combiner of purloined detail.

In the region of painting, he persuaded the languid coteries to abjure an academic tradition of admiration, and a mawkish tradition of presentation, in favour of a different but still narrow scheme of preferences, and a servile acceptance of unquestionable greatness. He gave Turner an extravagant place, and he held out a hand to that singular revolt known as Pre-Raphaelitism, the impulse of which has passed into the dignity of upholstery, and has done little more than infect native art with a precious kind of mediævalism.

But here again he did great work. He set the public thinking about art, and almost persuaded it that it cared for art. He made art serious and he made it respected; and here his teaching may yet bear fruit, though it was disfigured by his ethical bias, which confused the truth of things, by trying to refer two perfectly separate impulses—the moral and the artistic—to one basis. I myself believe that the English feeling for art is a very placid sentiment, with little that is passionate about it; but though it has not yet attained much vitality, it may develop in the future: and even if Ruskin did not sow the seed, he at least hoed up the fallow.

And then as a writer he can hardly be said to have established a tradition, because his art depended upon so intimate and personal a charm. I am thankful myself that he did not establish a tradition in this respect—for while such a tradition is a great sign of commanding influence in a writer, it is a sign of a corresponding weakness in his followers. Writers must learn to express their thoughts in their own way; and it is better to borrow thoughts than to purloin a medium. The art of literary imitation is a very easy one, and needs only a very second-rate gift. Small wonder that we Englishmen, trained on so narrow a classical tradition, should be so prone to rank literary imitation high. Boys who have been taught that the best Latin verse and prose is the most ingenious cento of phrases, not imitated but transferred from classical writers, may be excused if they rank the gift of imitation above that of forcible expression. I mean to discuss the style of Ruskin elsewhere, but I hold that one of his supreme felicities was that his mind was not cramped by a classical education. I do not undervalue that education for other purposes; it lends some exactness of thought and some

terseness of expression to practical minds. But Ruskin is only one of the notable instances which go far to prove that the greatest writers of the century—Keats, Walter Scott, Carlyle, Browning—were men who hardly came under classical influences at all; while other great writers—Wordsworth, Tennyson, Byron, and Shelley—obtained no distinction in academical exercises; and the few great writers whom our universities rewarded, such as Matthew Arnold, Newman, and Pater, can hardly be ranked among the leading literary influences of the century.

And let me here add the strange and somewhat whimsical summary which Ruskin gave of his own life-work, a short time before he sank into the final silence.

"For in rough approximation of date nearest to the completion of the several pieces of my past work, as they are built one on the other,—at twenty, I wrote *Modern Painters;* at thirty, *The Stones of Venice;* at forty, *Unto this Last;* at fifty the Inaugural Oxford Lectures; and if *Fors Clavigera* is ever finished as I mean—it will mark the mind I had at sixty; and leave me in my seventh day of life, perhaps—to rest. For the code of all I had to teach will then be, in form, as it is at this hour, in substance, completed.

Modern Painters taught the claim of all lower nature on the hearts of men; of the rock, and wave, and herb, as a part of their necessary spirit life; in all that I now bid you to do, to dress the earth and keep it, I am fulfilling what I then began.

"*The Stones of Venice* taught the laws of constructive Art, and the dependence of all human work or edifice, for its beauty, on the happy life of the workman; *Unto this Last* taught the laws of that life itself, and its dependence on the Sun of Justice; the Inaugural Oxford Lectures, the necessity that it should be led, and the gracious laws of beauty and labour recognised, by the upper, no less than the lower, classes of England; and lastly, *Fors Clavigera* has declared the relation of these to each other, and the only possible conditions of peace and honour, for low and high, rich and poor, together, in the holding of that first Estate, under the only Despot, God, from which whoso falls, angel or man, is kept, not mythically or disputably, but here in visible horror of chains under darkness to the judgment of the great day: and in keeping which service is perfect freedom, and inheritance of all that a loving Creator can give to His creatures, and an immortal Father to His children:

"This, then, is the message, which, knowing no more as I unfolded the scroll of it, what next would be written there, than a blade of grass knows what the form of its fruit shall be,

I have been led on year by year to speak, even to this its end.

And now it seems to me, looking back over the various fragments of it written since the year 1860, *Unto this Last*, *Time and Tide*, *Munera Pulveris*, and *Eagle's Nest*, together with the seven years' volumes of *Fors Clavigera*, that it has been clearly enough and repeatedly enough spoken for those who will hear: and that, after such indexed summary of it as I may be able to give in the remaining numbers of this seventh volume, I should set aside this political work as sufficiently done; and enter into my own rest, and your next needed service, by completing the bye-law books of Botany and Geology for St. George's Schools, together with so much law of art as it may be possible to explain or exhibit, under the foul conditions of the age."

4

There is yet another point on which stress must be laid, and that is Ruskin's incredible and dangerous industry; as he once wrote, "Life without industry is guilt; and industry without art is brutality." Let us compare him with his great contemporary Carlyle, in whom long periods of solid diligence alternated with long stretches of mournful indolence. Carlyle was a sayer of great truths, and I am not so mean as to try to under-

value his splendid service to his generation. But Carlyle was not possessed by the intense desire to do tangible and practical things for mankind, though he said that a solidly built bridge was a finer and a holier thing than the best book ever written; and there is truth in the humorous words of FitzGerald, that Carlyle had sat pretty comfortably in his study at Chelsea, scolding all the world for not being heroic, and yet not very precise in telling them how. But the record of Ruskin's life and his busy days is not like this. He was consumed by a demon of activity. Consider the sort of day which he used to spend in Venice, rising with the dawn, drawing, as he humorously said, one half of a building while the masons were employed in pulling down the other half, taking measurements, noting details, doing this for ten hours at a stretch till the shadows had shifted; then going back to write, read and talk; and this not once or twice a week, but day by day for months together. Remember the kind of life he lived in Oxford, talking, lecturing, working, teaching in his drawing school, and then going back to his home to work and read, with an endless flood of letters pouring in upon him day by day, which he answered fully,

patiently, courteously, and humorously, never taking refuge behind fixed phrases, but putting a part of himself into every sentence he ever penned. And all the while he was planning museums and arranging collections, while his researches into natural things were not merely a poetical contemplation or a dilettante catching of effects, but hard discrimination and careful experiment. I do not believe that there was ever a life lived of such tremendous activity, and none of it mechanical toil, but heart-wasting and brain-consuming work. The wonder is not that his brain gave way, but that it did not collapse long before. Even a conversation was not an easy thing for Ruskin. He was always willing to see and talk to strangers as well as friends; he never was absorbed or preoccupied, but he put his heart into his talk; he never declined upon impressive platitudes, but he turned on the full strength of his mental current, whatever was his need of silence and rest.

He has by some been shamefully accused of *pose*. The mischief of that criticism is that there is something in it. "To the vanity," he once wrote, "I plead guilty—no man is more intensely vain than I am; but my vanity is set

on having it *known* of me that I am a good master, not in having it *said* of me that I am a smooth author. My vanity is never more wounded than in being called a fine writer, meaning—that nobody need mind what I say."

But of course it may be admitted that in the case of all men who live for and in performance, whether it be on sackbut or dulcimer, on stage or in pulpit, with brush or pen, it is impossible to eliminate a dash of the essential mountebank—the quality which, reduced to its lowest formula, may be summed up in the words, "See me do it!" and the child who began by saying from his nursery pulpit "People, be good," was sure on occasion to say more than he knew, and indeed had reason to be thankful if he did not say more than he meant.

But the essence of the *poseur* is this, that all that he does, he regards from the point of view, not of the effect it may have on others, or for the share that he may take in the service of the world, but that the echo and reflection of his effectiveness may come back to him from the mouths and eyes of men, like the airy chords which come back from precipice and crag at the blast of some Alpine horn. The *poseur* does

not desire to be served, but to be known to serve. It is his own content, and not the content of others that he is in search of. It is no happiness to him to have added to the peace of the world, if he is unpraised and unhonoured. No one can be unaware of the comforting warmth of fame, earned or unearned; but that was not what Ruskin wanted. And it is a vile calumny to say that he worked for his own honour and satisfaction. He desired to increase and multiply joy; he did increase it a hundredfold, and most when he was himself sorrowful even unto death.

I do not want here to disguise his faults: he was exacting, suspicious, irritable and wayward. He had none of the bluff good-humour, the sturdy dutifulness of the solid type of Englishman, who does fine work in the world. He could not bear to be thwarted or opposed. He was dogmatic, self-opinionated, and vain; but these faults are but the seams and channels in the weather-worn crag, which would otherwise be but a meaningless pyramid of stone. We ought not to love the faults of great men or to condone them, but we may love them because of their faults, and because of the gallant fight they made with them, with an intensity and a compassion

that we cannot give to statuesque and flawless lives. The whole thing, in its enthusiasm, its guilelessness, its passion for all that is pure and beautiful, is so infinitely noble, that I for one can but regard it with an awe and a gratitude that is half wonder and half shame—wonder at a thing so great, and shame that one can be so far away from what a man may be.

5

And so one is brought back to the fact that it was as a personality that Ruskin had his effect on the generation ; and that personality I shall try to delineate, though of all things in the world personality is the hardest thing to estimate, for one simple reason, that a character is not only, as is often supposed, a mixture of ingredients, like a salad or a stew, the net result of which is grateful and savoury. It may be looked at in that aspect, and it is true enough that in dealing with people for ordinary social purposes, one is justified in regarding temperaments in this light, as compounded dishes, where a certain balance and proportion of qualities makes the effect of a personality pungent or fragrant, commonplace or repellent, as the case may be. But when it comes to the deeper

relations of life, when one is concerned with loving and admiring people, being moved by what they say or think, imitating them, even worshipping them, there come in two further qualities, which are not only a question of blend and proportion, but two perfectly distinct things—two qualities which are difficult to disentangle and analyse, because they permeate other qualities, making them on the one hand attractive and on the other emphatic. And these two great qualities are on the one hand charm, and on the other moral force. It is very hard to say what charm is, and in what it consists. It is a thing which some people possess to an extraordinary degree, making all that they do or say interesting and beautiful, penetrating gesture and movement, feature and voice, so that it all seems a revelation of some secret and inner beauty of soul and mind. Yet this charm is in itself and by itself a dangerous thing, for it often coexists without any great degree of moral force, and lives so much in its own power of pleasing, that it is often apt to lead its owner to make any sacrifices if only he can please. And thus because such charm is as much felt by the evil and sensual as by the high-minded and pure, it sometimes falls a victim quite early in

life to gross and robust influences, and is carried off captive over dark seas of experience, like some beautiful slave to serve the passion of evil masters.

And then too there is a further kind of charm, which is not a superficial charm, but the fragrance of a sweet-tempered, simple, and peaceable character, which wins regard and trust because it is modest and trustworthy, reasonable and sympathetic, and does not easily condemn or despise. Such as these have a way of drawing out and evoking the best of others, and are loved partly on that account.

Now Ruskin had both of these kinds of charm. It may again be stated that though he was often, in his public utterances, vehement, bitter, and incisive, these qualities did not appear in his private intercourse or in his talk. He was in ordinary companionship extraordinarily graceful and winning, courteous and considerate. Not only was his own talk flowing and suggestive, and full of beauty both of thought and word, but he had a power of comforting and reassuring the shy and awkward, of deftly taking up and embellishing the murmurs of embarrassed people, yet without seeming to make them his own. And he had too a delightful frankness, which made his companions feel

that he was saying what he thought, and giving his best. In this he was like Carlyle, who grumbled and fulminated, heaven knows, in his writings, but whose private vehemences and violences were corrected by a glance both humorous and tender, which took off the edge of his incisiveness and sugared the bitter cup. And Ruskin too, in his public lectures, had an incomparable atmosphere of grace and pathos about him. His high, clear, and delicate voice rose like the voice of the wind; his vehement and brilliant gestures amplified and interpreted his words; and his flashing eyes, with their pale-blue light, now indignant and now appealing, intercepted and electrified the glances of his hearers. There was little of the art of the orator about him—little of that voluminous thunder which in men like Mr. Bright or Mr. Gladstone dominated an audience and kept them spell-bound, waiting on every measured word. Compared to these the eloquence of Ruskin had an almost feminine quality; it was the music of the soul that made itself heard, whether in the passionate enthusiasm for some work of delicate grace or suggestive beauty, or the poignant personal distress, the uncomforted cry for faith and strength, which came with such an appealing frankness from his lips.

And then of that other quality, which I have called moral force, which is like the steam of the engine or the charge of the gun—that force of conviction which drives a truth home into careless or indifferent minds—this he had in fullest measure. It may be thought that part of Ruskin's sick vision of the world, the insistence with which the meanness, the stupidity, the indifference, the cruelty of humanity beat upon him, came from within rather than from without. And of course such melancholy as his does reach and react upon the overstrung brain. One in Ruskin's frame of mind selects, by an instinctive sadness, those elements of experience and fact which confirm his hopeless outlook; and thus his sadness is deepened and fed.

But for all that he had the power, which I have spoken of before,—and which is a power confined to the truest and noblest of human spirits,—that power of concerning itself not with its own comfort and welfare, but with the welfare of the world, and grieving intolerably over evils which seem so unnecessary, and which yet are so impossible to prevent or to cure. The selfish man, at the sight of suffering and misery, asks brutally, "Am I my brother's keeper?" or he shrugs his shoulders

cynically at what he does not approve, or even takes a secret and complacent pleasure in the thought that he enjoys immunity from such troubles, or perhaps even congratulates himself on the strength and prudence which have preserved him from such catastrophes. That is the attitude of the Pharisee and the tyrant, and it is by that temper that the worst evils of the world are propagated and perpetuated.

But Ruskin, and such as Ruskin, cast themselves with a blind fury of indignation and anger into the fray. They are so sensitive to all injustice and to all brutality, that they lose themselves in scathing words, and feverish phrases of horror and disgust and despair. And then when the schemes that seem to such prophets so simple and so desirable, so effective in helping humanity out of the mire, all break down and incur ridicule and contempt, what wonder if they fall into wretchedness and frenzy at the thought of all the happiness which men throw away for themselves, and the happiness of which men deprive others out of mere wantonness and carelessness? It was here, I think, that the strength of Ruskin's message lay. Men who see and feel as he did are the hope of the human race, because they show that the

moral temperature is slowly but surely rising, and that the generous and noble impulses of the conscience and the heart are on the increase. And Ruskin had to my mind one distinguishing mark of the true prophet—that he was no patriot. He was concerned with human rather than with national welfare. I am not decrying the force of patriotism, or the part it plays in the development of the human race. But there is a nobler enthusiasm even than the enthusiasm for race and nation; because the triumph of patriotism must necessarily carry with it the quenching of the aspirations of other nations, their defeat and their discomfiture. It is only tyranny on a larger scale. Ruskin no doubt miscalculated and misunderstood the nature of his countrymen, the insularity and the isolation which marks their conquering path. But no one who cares for the larger hopes of humanity can hope or dream that the end is to be limited by national greatness. That is not a popular vision in England, unless it is accompanied by a proviso that the seat of the federated government of the world shall be in London, and that English shall be the language of the human race. But Ruskin judged other nations not according to their resemblance to our own race, but by their virtue and nobility.

And it must be kept in mind that he was, like all the greatest figures of our late nineteenth century —Tennyson, Browning, Carlyle—a moralist before anything else. England, said a great French critic, is pre-eminent for the seriousness with which she has treated moral ideas in art; and there is no disguising the fact that morality and not art is our main concern. Part of Ruskin's influence was due to the fact that he based art on morality; and there is little doubt that if he had preached art as vehemently for its own sake, he would have found but few listeners and fewer disciples.

It is then as a personality and as a moralist that we have to regard him; as a man of clear vision, relentless idealism, and kindling speech; who above all manifested the splendid instinctive abnegation of private happiness, not calculating loss and gain in a spirit of barter, but finding contentment impossible, while others were ill-content; that spirit which is expressed by a parable in the beautiful words of the Song of Songs: "They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept."

And now I will say one last thing to which all that I have said has been leading—a thing

borne to me upon the winds and waves of life, by grievous experience, and, I am not ashamed to say, by sad self-questioning. And this thing is confirmed, in its height and depth, by the wonderful life that we have been considering. No saint or philosopher has ever done more than guess, in fear and perplexity often, and rarely in confidence or certainty, at the meaning of our life, our pilgrimage. So much of life, in spite of its glimpses of joy and light, seems so aimless, so perplexed, so unaccountable, with its mysterious satisfactions, its disproportionate sorrows. But the best and noblest of men have seemed to see in it a chance, if we are frank and candid in facing experience, and if we are not dismayed by its shadows or misled by its sunshine, a chance of having something done for our spirits which can be done in no other way. A good many people start with a high-hearted belief in life and its possibilities; and then like the grain sown by the Heavenly Sower, many lives are withered by sensuality, or choked by prosperity, or eaten up by evil influences, or drenched by dulness; but whatever happens we are not meant to find life easy and delightful; it is a discipline, when all is said and done. But there

is something deeper than that. "Depend upon it," said old Carlyle, "the brave man has somehow or other to give his life away." We are called upon to make an unconditional surrender. Unconditional I say, because it cannot be on our own terms. We cannot reserve what we like, or choose what we prefer. It is a surrender to a great and awful Will, of whose workings we know little, but which means to triumph, whatever we may do to hinder or delay its purpose. We must work indeed by the best light that we have. We must do the next thing, and the kind thing, and the courageous thing, as it falls to us to do. But sooner or later we must yield our wills up, and not simply out of tame and fearful submission, but because we at last see that the Will behind all things is greater, purer, more beautiful, more holy than anything we can imagine or express. Some find this easier than others—and some never seem to achieve it—which is the hardest problem of all. But there is no peace without that surrender, though it cannot be made at once; there is in most of us a fibre of self-will, of hardness, of stubbornness which we cannot break, but which God may be trusted to break for us, if we desire it to be broken. And the

reason why the life of Ruskin is so marvellous a record, is that we here see the unconditional surrender, of which I speak, made on the most august scale by a man dear to God, starting in life with high gifts and noble advantages.

Will you bear with me if I entreat you to discern this truth not in the life of Ruskin but in your own lives as well? Do not think for a moment that I mean that life ought to be a mournful metaphysic, without light and energy and joy. The more of these that we have in our lives the better for each and all. But if the light is clouded, and the joy is blotted out, and the energy burns low, it is a sign not that we have failed, but that the mind of God is bent still more urgently upon us. What we may pray for and desire is courage, to live eagerly in joy and not less eagerly in sorrow; to be temperate in happiness, and courageous in trouble; that we may say in the words of Ruskin's great poet-friend, whose splendid optimism still made the great surrender—

> "What's Life to me?
> Where'er I look is fire; where'er I listen
> Music; and where I tend, bliss evermore."

LECTURE VII

I

THERE is a great deal scattered about through Ruskin's various books of the development of his literary style, and of the various influences which helped to mould it. His own account of the matter is very interesting, not because it offers a key to the mystery, but because it wholly fails to explain anything or to account for anything. It is rather as though a painter were to say what kinds of brushes he used, and where he got his colours; but the instinct by which the artist knows that a blot of paint of a certain shape and in a certain juxtaposition will produce the effect upon the eye of a moss-grown stone, or of a tuft of meadow-grass, this is the incommunicable and the inexplicable thing. It is the same with language. We have all of us all the material to work with which Ruskin had. The thoughts are not wholly original or unfamiliar. We can most of us con-

struct a grammatical sentence, and it is in our power if we choose to make lists of striking words. But what we cannot command is the delicate ripple of mood, the ironical emphasis, the contrast of humour and pathos, the subtle insistence on the central thought, the logical staircase that leads to the peremptory climax. Then too comes in the art of the coherent paragraph, the parenthesis that refreshes and sustains the thought, the melodious cadence of words, the subtle alliteration. Ruskin had, first of all, intensity of feeling, then great lucidity of expression—I do not feel that his intellectual grasp is very great. He can, or he could in earlier days, follow a definite path, and pick his way very directly, to the goal, avoiding the thoughts which are not the exact ones that he needs, and which tend by their similarity to the central thought to confuse the less precise thinker; but he had not the gift of a wide survey, the power which very impressive writers have of letting the whole body of thought just influence and contribute to, without distracting or blurring, the central point. He had a splendid gift of picturesque illustration, and in the earlier days a wonderful power of metaphor—of expressing one thought in the terms

of another, which is the essence of the poetical gift. And then, though he never mastered the limitations of poetry—he was indeed mastered by them—his poetical work gave him a great range of vocabulary, and a matchless power of amassing together words beautiful in themselves, and infinitely enhanced by their contact with other words.

Pope was one of his masters, he says, for absolute lucidity of expression, perfect balance and conciseness, and complete freedom from anything otiose or disproportioned. One knows too that he fell at one time under the influence of Hooker, and that part of *Modern Painters* was written under the sway of Hooker's stately deliberation and his incomparable cogency of thought. And further, he states that he owed much to Dr. Johnson, in respect of clear and just statement, orderly sequence, and harmonious evolutions.

But he insists that he owed his vocabulary, his sense of rhythm and cadence, the solemnity and dignity of his vocabulary, entirely to his study of the Bible.

Here is the passage in which he makes the above statement:—

"I have above said that had it not been for constant reading of the Bible, I might probably have taken Johnson for my model of English. To a useful extent I have always done so; in these first essays, partly because I could not help it, partly of set, and well set, purpose.

"On our foreign journeys, it being of course desirable to keep the luggage as light as possible, my father had judged that four little volumes of Johnson—the *Idler* and the *Rambler*—did, under names wholly appropriate to the circumstances, contain more substantial literary nourishment than could be, from any other author, packed into so portable compass. And accordingly, in spare hours, and on wet days, the turns and returns of reiterated *Rambler* and iterated *Idler* fastened themselves in my ears and mind; nor was it possible for me, till long afterwards, to quit myself of Johnsonian symmetry and balance in sentences intended, either with swordsman's or pavior's blow, to cleave an enemy's crest, or drive down the oaken pile of a principle. I never for an instant compared Johnson to Scott, Pope, Byron, or any of the really great writers whom I loved. But I at once and for ever recognised in him a man entirely sincere, and infallibly wise in the view and estimate he gave of the common questions, business, and ways of the world. I valued his sentences not primarily because they were symmetrical, but because they were just, and clear; it is a method of judgment rarely used by the average public, who ask from

an author always, in the first place, arguments in favour of their own opinions, in elegant terms; and are just as ready with their applause for a sentence of Macaulay's, which may have no more sense in it than a blot pinched between doubled paper, as to reject one of Johnson's, telling against their own prejudice,—though its symmetry be as of thunder answering from two horizons."

This is to a certain extent true; but the truth lies deeper still; Ruskin did not really find his style until he had finally and effectually freed himself from all such influences. He began by having a rich and sonorous vocabulary, a strong sense of balance and antithesis, preference for rolling rhetoric and answering clauses. The effects are patent and indisputable; but it is rhetoric, and sometimes almost bombast. It is like a child playing with thunderbolts, and finding it excellent fun. The sentences smell of the platform and of the pulpit; they are youthfully resplendent, and dogmatic with the infallibility of inexperience. One feels the writer is saying, "Here we go," and half the joy of it lies, not in having something to say, but in saying it so loud and clear. Of course when all is said, it is the work of a man of genius, but it is hard, metallic, made-up writing. There are plenty of fine things said and trumpeted

out; but it is in no sense great work, except in its fine vigour and peremptoriness, and in the promise of mastery given by the fervent analysis and boisterous energy.

Here is an instance of the measured Johnsonian manner:—

"He who has built himself a hut on a desert heath, and carved his bed, and table, and chair out of the nearest forest, may have some right to take pride in the appliances of his narrow chamber, as assuredly he will have joy in them. But the man who has had a palace built, and adorned, and furnished for him, may indeed have many advantages above the other, but he has no reason to be proud of his upholsterer's skill; and it is ten to one if he has half the joy in his couch of ivory that the other will have in his pallet of pine."

In the following passage, which stood in the first and second editions of *Modern Painters*, but was cancelled in the third, he describes the treatment of Venice by certain great artists. He concludes:—

"But let us take, with Turner, the last and greatest step of all. Thank heaven, we are in sunshine again,—and what sunshine! Not the lurid, gloomy, plague-like oppression of Canaletti, but white, flashing fulness of dazzling

light, which the waves drink and the clouds breathe, bounding and burning in intensity of joy. That sky,—it is a very visible infinity,—liquid, measureless, unfathomable, panting and melting through the chasms in the long fields of snow-white, flaked, slow-moving vapour, that guide the eye along their multitudinous waves down to the islanded rest of the Euganean hills. Do we dream, or does the white forked sail drift nearer, and nearer yet, diminishing the blue sea between us with the fulness of its wings? It pauses now; but the quivering of its bright reflection troubles the shadows of the sea, those azure, fathomless depths of crystal mystery on which the swiftness of the poised gondola floats double, its black beak lifted like the crest of a dark ocean bird, its scarlet draperies flashed back from the kindling surface, and its bent oar breaking the radiant water into a dust of gold. Dreamlike and dim, but glorious, the unnumbered palaces lift their shafts out of the hollow sea,—pale ranks of motionless flame,—their mighty towers sent up to heaven like tongues of more eager fire,—their grey domes looming vast and dark, like eclipsed worlds,—their sculptured arabesques and purple marble fading farther and fainter, league beyond league, lost in the light of distance. Detail after detail, thought beyond thought, you find and feel them through the radiant mystery, inexhaustible as indistinct, beautiful, but never all revealed; secret in fulness, confused in symmetry, as nature herself is to the bewildered and foiled glance,

giving out of that indistinctness, and through that confusion, the perpetual newness of the infinite and the beautiful.

"Yes, Mr Turner, we are in Venice now."

Let me here frankly confess that to myself the style of the *Modern Painters* is not wholly attractive. It is too argumentative and rhetorical, didactic rather than persuasive, and the device grows monotonous by which the thought gets gradually infused by emotion, until it culminates in one of those rich rolling sentences, which break like a huge sea-billow, full of sound and colour and motion. But the beauty of the great sentences themselves are indisputable, the perfect certainty of touch, the feeling that he is never mastered by his material, but has all the substance of language at his command—these qualities are patent and undeniable. But one feels rather as Queen Victoria is recorded to have said of Mr. Gladstone, that she disliked her interviews with him because he talked to her as if she was a public meeting. There is a sense of being clamoured at and overwhelmed, rather than of being led and persuaded. And there is something more than bitterness in Whistler's famous criticism when he said that

Ruskin was possessed of "a flow of language that would, could he hear it, give Titian the same shock of surprise that was Balaam's, when the first great critic proffered his opinions."

Ruskin wrote, as we know, with singular ease, but at the same time he took immense pains. He rose very early, and did his writing in the freshness of the day, and it was his habit to read aloud at breakfast, to his family or his fellow-travellers, what he had written, for their approval rather than for their criticism.

The characteristics which I have mentioned mark all his earlier work. You will find them in his earliest papers, those elaborate studies of cottage architecture in various countries, which he contributed when hardly more than a boy to a magazine: and this manner culminates in the *Stones of Venice*, in which he showed the ultimate development of this didactic and rhetorical art.

Then we come to the middle manner—the later volumes of the *Modern Painters* and the books like *Sesame and Lilies*. Here the vehemence is a good deal abated; there is a substitution, so to speak, of wood for wind; the blare of the cornet is exchanged for the softer melody

of what the Greeks called "the spittle-wasting flute." The style has lost in hardness and gained immensely in beauty. There is still a love of balance and antithesis; but it is now more a question of orderly sequence and structure—the counterpoint is less visible. And here I may say is the point at which the ordinary reader stops. The man of taste and intelligence can perceive as a rule the faults of the earlier manner, its gusty eloquence, its sharp-cut melody. He can detect the mellifluous beauty of the new cadences, the more equable texture; if he sees the art of it less, he is aware still more subtly that it is there. And I would not say a word to shake any one's faith in the perfection of the art, or his admiration of the more chastened mood. Irony, tender and delicate enough, has taken the place of trenchant censure or sharp sarcasm. Ruskin allows himself to feel more in public, to employ more intimate emotions, more delicate mysteries of thought. A touch of failure and suffering has laid its chastening hand upon the page; he is not less sure, but he is less dogmatic; and he has learnt that men must be persuaded rather than commanded to believe.

Here are one or two instances of this fine manner. The first is a very famous passage on Calais church, of which he himself did not wholly approve, because he thought that the word-painting of it distracted the minds of his readers from more valuable considerations.

"I cannot find words to express the intense pleasure I have always in first finding myself, after some prolonged stay in England, at the foot of the old tower of Calais church. The large neglect, the noble unsightliness of it; the record of its years written so visibly, yet without sign of weakness or decay; its stern wasteness and gloom, eaten away by the Channel winds, and overgrown with the bitter sea grasses; its slates and tiles all shaken and rent, and yet not falling; its desert of brickwork full of bolts, and holes, and ugly fissures, and yet strong, like a bare brown rock; its carelessness of what any one thinks or feels about it, putting forth no claim, having no beauty nor desirableness, pride, nor grace; yet neither asking for pity; not, as ruins are, useless and piteous, feebly or fondly garrulous of better days; but useful still, going through its own daily work,—as some old fisherman beaten grey by storm, yet drawing his daily nets: so it stands, with no complaint about its past youth, in blanched and meagre massiveness and serviceableness, gathering human souls together underneath it; the sound of its bells for prayer still rolling

through its rents: and the grey peak of it seen far across the sea, principal of the three that rise above the waste of surfy sand and hillocked shore,—the lighthouse for life, and the belfry for labour, and this for patience and praise."

And the following is a piece which illustrates his ironical manner, a description from the fourth volume of *Modern Painters* of Claude's picture of the Mill:—

"The foreground is a piece of very lovely and perfect forest scenery, with a dance of peasants by a brook side; quite enough subject to form, in the hands of a master, an impressive and complete picture. On the other side of the brook, however, we have a piece of pastoral life; a man with some bulls and goats tumbling headforemost into the water, owing to some sudden paralytic affection of all their legs. Even this group is one too many; the shepherd had no business to drive his flock so near the dancers, and the dancers will certainly frighten the cattle. But when we look farther into the picture, our feelings receive a sudden and violent shock, by the unexpected appearance, amidst things pastoral and musical, of the military; a number of Roman soldiers riding in on hobby-horses, with a leader on foot, apparently encouraging them to make an immediate and decisive charge on the musicians. Beyond the soldiers is a circular temple, in exceedingly bad repair; and close beside it, built

against its very walls, a neat watermill in full work. By the mill flows a large river with a weir all across it. The weir has not been made for the mill (for that receives its water from the hills by a trough carried over the temple), but it is particularly ugly and monotonous in its line of fall, and the water below forms a dead-looking pond, on which some people are fishing in punts. The banks of this river resemble in contour the later geological formations around London, constituted chiefly of broken pots and oyster-shells. At an inconvenient distance from the water-side stands a city, composed of twenty-five round towers and a pyramid. Beyond the city is a handsome bridge; beyond the bridge, part of the Campagna, with fragments of aqueducts; beyond the Campagna, the chain of the Alps; on the left, the cascades of Tivoli."

The following passage is from *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*:—

"An architect should live as little in cities as a painter. Send him to our hills and let him study there what nature understands by a buttress, and what by a dome.

"There was something in the old power of architecture, which it had from the recluse more than from the citizen. The buildings of which I have spoken with chief praise, rose, indeed, out of the war of the piazza, and above the fury of the populace: and Heaven forbid that for such cause we should ever have to lay a larger stone, or rivet

a firmer bar in our England! But we have other sources of power, in the imagery of our iron coasts and azure hills; of power more pure, nor less serene, than that of the hermit spirit which once lighted with white lines of cloisters the glades of the Alpine pine, and raised into ordered spires the wild rocks of the Norman sea; which gave to the temple gate the depth and darkness of Elijah's Horeb cave; and lifted, out of the populous city, grey cliffs of lonely stone, into the midst of sailing birds and silent air."

And here is a wonderful word-cadence from one of his later lectures at Oxford, where he is speaking of the dove:—

"And of these wings and this mind of hers, this is what reverent science should teach you: first with what parting of plume and what soft pressure and rhythmic beating of divided air she reaches that miraculous swiftness of undubious motion compared with which the tempest is slow and the arrow uncertain: and secondly what clue there is, visible, or conceivable to thought of man, by which, to her living conscience and errorless pointing of magnetic soul, her distant home is felt afar beyond the horizon, and the straight path, through concealing clouds, and over trackless lands, made plain to her desire, and her duty, by the finger of God."

2

And here, as I have said, many firm believers part company with Ruskin, as disciples have before now forsaken their master. In *Fors Clavigera*, a reader, however faithful, is apt to be disconcerted by the tense passion of emotion, the fantastic changes and counterchanges, the inconsequent sequence of statements, the fiery restlessness, the wild discursiveness, the dim presence of something diseased and terrifying in the background, that seems to cry and weep. But I have no sort of doubt that in *Fors Clavigera* Ruskin reached a far higher level of art than he had ever reached before, because he was doing a thing which is not, I believe, attempted elsewhere in literature. He was thinking aloud. If any of you will try an experiment in this process you will find the incredible difficulty of the task. You know how most of us in idle moments, or perhaps even more in moments when we are officially supposed to be occupied, lapse into a reverie, in which a stream of thought—it may be placid, it may be vehement—sweeps through the brain from the flushed reservoir of the mind. Suppose you check yourself suddenly in one of these reveries. Try to put down in words what

you have been thinking of, and as you thought it. You will find it to be ludicrously impossible. Half the thoughts have passed without clothing themselves in any vesture of word, one thing has suggested another, often enough by some trivial similarity of superficial form. The whole thing is evasive, elusive, irrecoverable. Yet it was exactly this which Ruskin did. He had attained by native instinct and by enormous industry a power of words to which I hardly know any equal. Perhaps Browning might have attained it, if he had worked in prose. But what is more wonderful still is the kaleidoscopic variety of emotion—serious, profound, indignant, tender, humorous, menacing, severe, playful, ironical moods—which flash and twinkle like a rippling sea. It is not merely the representation of a sustained mood, to which many great writers have attained ; it is the representation of moods as various, and transitions as swift, as ever passed through a human mind. The process by which the very stuff of the soul here takes shape is, I own, utterly incomprehensible to me, because it seems not so much different in scope, but different in kind from anything which any other writer has ever dreamed of attempting.

And now, out of the deep upheaval of thought,

the wreck of all his old security and self-confidence, the devastating sadness which laid its hand upon him, he developed a perfectly new manner of writing, which seems to me to belong to a wholly different and infinitely higher range of art. He threw aside all that was frigid and academical and formal; he retained the lucid emphasis and the rich texture of language. But instead of composing a stately and impressive argument, he gained a new art, that of thinking his thought into words. Perhaps this testified to a certain lack of mental concentration; but the result is that instead of seeing the mind in posture and performance, you can look into it like a clear stream, and watch every break and ripple of the crystal tide. The result is a kind of ease, which seems the most absolutely effortless and spontaneous thing, and yet it is a thing which none but the very highest masters of style and expression have achieved. Indeed I will say frankly that I know of no writer in the world except Plato who has achieved this. There are writers, like Scott and Thackeray, who got the same command over their medium; but theirs is a simpler task, because they deal only with narrative and the play of definite emotions. But Ruskin was moving in a loftier and more complex

intellectual region, that of reflective emotion, where the very ideas are vague and mist-like, and the task is rather to give a sense of the atmosphere of the mind rather than its definite judgments and conclusions.

He reached then the height of his power in *Fors Clavigera*, which achieves that triumph of literary genius, the sense that the reader is within the very four walls of the writer's mind. Of course writing may be used for many purposes, and among these purposes are some that are achieved best when all sense of personality is withdrawn. But the real goal which lies behind such art is that of self-revelation. It is a great mistake to suppose that this means that a writer should do nothing but talk about himself. That is not the point at all—indeed it is one of the surest ways of avoiding the sense of personality. A man may entertain you, point out his possessions, talk continuously and persistently about his tastes and preferences, and yet leave you knowing nothing of the spirit within. But Ruskin admits you to the inmost shrine of his spirit, where the soul is naked and unashamed. You see the pulsing blood and the palpitating heart. Nothing is hidden from you, nothing forced upon the view. And it

all culminated in the exquisite *Præterita*, which for utter frankness and directness has no equal. It is not as though he were bidding you count his wounds, share his vanished joys, compassionate his sorrows. He is far past all that. His own heart has given him all the comfort of which it is capable, and far more pain than any faith or philosophy can staunch or heal. Like the Ancient Mariner or the Last Minstrel, he tells his tale, in obedience to the primal law of utterance. He looks for no reward nor applause; he merely unburdens himself of the awful, the mysterious secret of life.

Here is as much as I dare quote of a letter in *Fors Clavigera*, entitled "The Elysian Fields":—

"1. MY FRIENDS,—The main purpose of these letters having been stated in the last of them, it is needful that I should tell you why I approach the discussion of it in this so desultory way, writing (as it is too true that I must continue to write) 'of things that you little care for, in words that you cannot easily understand.'

"I write of things you care little for, knowing that what you least care for is, at this juncture, of the greatest moment to you.

"And I write in words you are little likely to understand, because I have no wish (rather the contrary) to tell you anything that you can

understand without taking trouble. You usually read so fast that you can catch nothing but the echo of your opinions, which, of course, you are pleased to see in print. I neither wish to please nor displease you; but to provoke you to think; to lead you to think accurately; and help you to form, perhaps, some different opinions from those you have now.

"2. Therefore, I choose that you shall pay me the price of two pots of beer, twelve times in the year, for my advice, each of you who wants it. If you like to think of me as a quack doctor, you are welcome; and you may consider the large margins, and thick paper, and ugly pictures of my book, as my caravan, drum, and skeleton. You would probably, if invited in that manner, buy my pills; and I should make a great deal of money out of you; but being an honest doctor, I still mean you to pay me what you ought. You fancy, doubtless, that I write—as most other political writers do—my 'opinions'; and that one man's opinion is as good as another's. You are much mistaken. When I only opine things, I hold my tongue; and work till I more than opine—until I know them. If the things prove unknowable, I, with final perseverance, hold my tongue about them, and recommend a like practice to other people. If the things prove knowable, as soon as I know them, I am ready to write about them, if need be; not till then. That is what people call my 'arrogance.' They write and talk themselves, habitually, of what they

know nothing about; they cannot in anywise conceive the state of mind of a person who will not speak till he knows; and then tells them, serenely, 'This is so; you may find it out for yourselves, if you choose; but, however little you may choose it, the thing is still so.'

"3. Now it has cost me twenty years of thought, and of hard reading, to learn what I have to tell you in these pamphlets; and you will find, if you choose to find, it is true; and may prove, if you choose to prove, that it is useful: and I am not in the least minded to compete for your audience with the 'opinions' in your damp journals, morning and evening, the black of them coming off on your fingers, and—beyond all washing—into your brains. It is no affair of mine whether you attend to me or not; but yours wholly; my hand is weary of pen-holding—my heart is sick of thinking; for my own part, I would not write you these pamphlets though you would give me a barrel of beer, instead of two pints, for them:—I write them wholly for your sake; I choose that you shall have them decently printed on cream-coloured paper, and with a margin underneath, which you can write on, if you like. That is also for your sake; it is a proper form of book for any man to have who can keep his books clean; and if he cannot, he has no business with books at all. It costs me ten pounds to print a thousand copies, and five more to give you a picture; and a penny off my sevenpence to send you the book:

—a thousand sixpences are twenty-five pounds; when you have bought a thousand *Fors* of me, I shall therefore have five pounds for my trouble —and my single shopman, Mr. Allen, five pounds for his; we won't work for less, either of us; not that we would not, were it good for you; but it would be by no means good. And I mean to sell all my large books, henceforward, in the same way; well printed, well bound, and at a fixed price; and the trade may charge a proper and acknowledged profit for their trouble in retailing the book. Then the public will know what they are about, and so will tradesmen; I, the first producer, answer, to the best of my power, for the quality of the book;—paper, binding, eloquence, and all: the retail dealer charges what he ought to charge, openly; and if the public do not choose to give it, they can't get the book. That is what I call legitimate business. Then as for this misunderstanding of me—remember that it is really not easy to understand anything, which you have not heard before, if it relates to a complex subject; also, it is quite easy to misunderstand things that you are hearing every day —which seem to you of the intelligiblest sort. But I *can* only write of things in my own way and as they come into my head; and of the things I care for, whether you care for them or not, as yet. I will answer for it, you must care for some of them in time.

"4. To take an instance close to my hand: you would of course think it little conducive to your

interests that I should give you any account of the wild hyacinths which are opening in flakes of blue fire, this day, within a couple of miles of me, in the glades of Bagley wood through which the Empress Maud fled in the snow (and which, by the way, I slink through, myself, in some discomfort, lest the gamekeeper of the college of the gracious Apostle St. John should catch sight of me; not that he would ultimately decline to make a distinction between a poacher and a professor, but that I dislike the trouble of giving an account of myself). Or, if even you would bear with a scientific sentence or two about them, explaining to you that they were only green leaves turned blue, and that it was of no consequence whether they were either green or blue; and that, as flowers, they were scientifically to be considered as not in existence,—you will, I fear, throw my letter, even though it has cost you sevenpence, aside at once, when I remark to you that these wood-hyacinths of Bagley have something to do with the battle of Marathon, and if you knew it, are of more vital interest to you than even the Match Tax.

"5. Nevertheless, as I shall feel it my duty, some day, to speak to you of Theseus and his vegetable soup, so, to-day, I think it necessary to tell you that the wood-hyacinth is the best English representative of the tribe of flowers which the Greeks called 'Asphodel,' and which they thought the heroes who had fallen in the battle of Marathon, or in any other battle, fought in just quarrel, were to be rewarded, and enough rewarded, by living in

fields-full of; fields called, by them, Elysian, or the Fields of Coming, as you and I talk of the good time 'Coming,' though with perhaps different views as to the nature of the to be expected goodness."

And last of all he wrote the *Præterita*. Much of it was only gathered afresh from the pages of *Fors Clavigera*. But here I think that, in spite of age and shattered health and broken mind, the art is at its very highest. The brain gathers itself together for a last effort before the silence falls. And here no doubt many readers who cannot find their way through the bewildering tangle of *Fors*, can join hands again; because here again the mood is a sustained one. It is like a man high on a mountain range, seeing through a gap of ragged cloud and sweeping storm the sunny spaces of the valley he has left behind, and to which he may no more return, tracing his happy wanderings by hedge and stream, watching the smoke go up from the chimneys of the house that has sheltered alike his radiant hopes and his quiet dreams; and seeing it all through a passion of sadness and failure and disappointment, which is too deep for any tear or sigh. There are passages in *Præterita* which seem to me like wreckage sinking through

the sea-depths, leaving the rout and fury of screaming wind and wide-flung billow, and grounding at last softly and quietly upon the unstirred sand, with no further to go, no resurrection to dread. The cup of wrath has been drunk, the last sad drops of the potion wrung out; he has experienced in life what others only experience in death, and he can say with bowed head and failing lip, "It is over."

Here are two characteristic passages:—

"The first joy of the year being in its snowdrops, the second, and cardinal one, was in the almond blossom,—every other garden and woodland gladness following from that in an unbroken order of kindling flower and shadowy leaf; and for many and many a year to come,—until indeed, the whole of life became autumn to me,—my chief prayer for the kindness of heaven, in its flowerful seasons, was that the frost might not touch the almond blossom."

And again:—

"My delight in these cottages, and in the sense of human industry and enjoyment through the whole scene, was at the root of all pleasure in its beauty; see the passage afterwards written in the *Seven Lamps* insisting on this as if it were general to human nature thus to admire through sympathy. I have noticed since, with sorrowful

accuracy, how many people there are who, wherever they find themselves, think only 'of their position.' But the feeling which gave me so much happiness, both then and through life, differed also curiously, in its impersonal character from that of many even of the best and kindest persons.

"In the beginning of the Carlyle-Emerson correspondence, edited with too little comment by my dear friend Charles Norton, I find at page 18 this—to me entirely disputable, and to my thought, so far as undisputed, much blameable and pitiable, exclamation of my master's: 'Not till we can think that here and there one is thinking of us, one is loving us, does this waste earth become a peopled garden.' My training, as the reader has perhaps enough perceived, produced in me the precisely opposite sentiment. *My* times of happiness had always been when *nobody* was thinking of me; and the main discomfort and drawback to all proceedings and designs, the attention and interference of the public—represented by my mother and the gardener. The garden was no waste place to me, because I did not suppose myself an object of interest either to the ants or the butterflies; and the only qualification of the entire delight of my evening walk at Champagnole or St. Laurent was the sense that my father and mother *were* thinking of me, and would be frightened if I was five minutes late for tea.

"I don't mean in the least that I could have

done without them. They were, to me, much more than Carlyle's wife to him; and if Carlyle had written, instead of, that he wanted Emerson to think of him in America, that he wanted his father and mother to be thinking of him at Ecclefechan, it had been well. But that the rest of the world was waste to him unless he had admirers in it, is a sorry state of sentiment enough; and I am somewhat tempted, for once, to admire the exactly opposite temper of my own solitude. My entire delight was in observing without being myself noticed,—if I could have been invisible, all the better. I was absolutely interested in men and their ways, as I was interested in marmots and chamois, in tomtits and trout. If only they would stay still and let me look at them, and not get into their holes and up their heights! The living inhabitation of the world—the grazing and nesting in it,—the spiritual power of the air, the rocks, the waters,—to be in the midst of it, and rejoice and wonder at it, and help it if I could,—happier if it needed no help of mine,—this was the essential love *of Nature* in me, this the root of all that I have usefully become, and the light of all that I have rightly learned."

3

Now the strange thing behind it all is this—and what I am about to say involves a clear statement about the critical apprehension of the British public

which must not be confused with censure or contempt. It is neither. It is simply a fact. Ruskin attained his position in the literary world, and in the view of many worthy persons maintains it now, by work that was not only inferior, but was pervaded by gross faults of dogmatism, erring knowledge and baseless judgments. His best work is still to a great extent unappreciated and unpraised, his genius hardly suspected. The British public wanted correct information, impressive argument, and conventional conclusions. What was the joy of that stolid and pathetic clientèle, when it found a man who could bully them into thinking that they cared about art, tell them exactly what pictures to buy and what to neglect, give eloquent reasons which made them believe they had gone to the bottom of the matter, and then—the crowning joy of all—tell them with thunders of conviction that the old moral law held good there as everywhere, that the bad man was the bad artist and the good man the good artist. It was a prodigious and colossal error; but it went straight to the heart of the nation; it confirmed the Psalms of David and the law of Moses; it fitted in, or so they thought, with the teaching of the Gospel and St. Paul. They were

delighted when Ruskin said, "In these books of mine, their distinctive character, as essays on art, is their bringing everything to a root in human passion or human hope . . . every principle of painting which I have stated is traced to some vital or spiritual fact . . . and is founded on a comparison of their influences on the life of the workman, a question by all other writers on the subject wholly forgotten or despised." At such a statement as this the enthusiasm of the public knew no bounds, because not only did it issue from a graduate of Oxford, and thus had the stamp of academic culture, but it was a conclusion worthy of a sermon, with this additional advantage that it was not a statement made by a clergyman from a pulpit, and thus open to a suspicion of professional motive, but made by a layman in a book of art criticism, and was thus a confirmation of the most respectable sort of morality, from a source which might naturally have been liable to a charge of dangerous bohemianism.

It was this that gave Ruskin his authority; though there were of course a few who saw somewhat deeper, and realised that there was in the utterances of Ruskin a passionate emotion and a sincere fidelity to truth, only obscured

by natural dogmatism and a rigid calvinistic training.

And then came the years when he seemed to throw aside wantonly and quixotically all the influence he had gained, and to flourish in the face of the public all sorts of crazy fancies and impossible dreams. In these years he was greatly discredited, though at last the sale of his books went up by leaps and bounds. The most charitable hypothesis freely indulged was that he was out of his mind. Nothing else could account for such ludicrous sincerity and such delirious schemes. But by this time many true spirits had discerned him rightly, and saw that if he was fallen into a passion of irritability and disgust, he was crazed not by disease but by the pressure of desperate thoughts. Perhaps his Professorship a little rehabilitated him in the eyes of the outer public. And then he did what is the most popular thing that one can do in England, an act which sets the crown upon any amount of even inefficient endeavour: he grew old, and became a public pet—a grand old man.

There is something to smile at in all this, no doubt; but there is food for something more like tears. Perhaps the point is that, with his

best unrecognised and with his secret misunderstood, he yet had gained a hearing; and it may be that thus his real influence will grow and bear fruit. But the process is so gigantically stupid and so outrageously coarse—the sense that derisive notoriety can achieve what genius and worth could not attain, is not without its shadow. The horror of it is this, that the frenzied writings of his tortured mind *amused* the public. They did not see that he was being crucified. They thought his agonised words the fantastic mockeries of a man who had lost his temper on a gigantic scale; and it was this that made them listen. It is all a very dark business. But we must try to put it all aside, and to stand if we can with the faithful few that stood helpless and distracted beside him in the hour of his agony, rather than with those that mocked him afar off, or that as they passed by reviled him.

4

And last of all I must say one word about his letters, because that is a very real province of literary art. We are past the time, and we

may be wholly thankful for it, when a man like Pope kept copies of his letters, improved them, added footnotes and introductions, and finally arranged that they should be stolen from him in a friendly manner and published without his supposed consent, and against his imagined wish, though he had prepared alike beforehand the theft and his own heart-broken protests. But we have had many fine letter-writers in England. To mention but a few, the letters of Gray are models of delicate taste, exquisite phrasing, and charming humour. The letters of Charles Lamb are notable for their tenderness, their good sense, and their delicious extravagance. The letters of Keats give the finest revelation I know of the glowing heart and mind of a young and splendid genius. The letters of FitzGerald are full of leisurely charm, gentle pathos, and keen discrimination. The letters of Carlyle have an intense and rugged glow, and a marvellous individuality of deeply-felt, contorted phrases, where the words are driven in gangs, like fettered slaves, to do their master's work. The letters of Mrs. Browning reveal a passion and a seriousness that cannot fail to inspire and even to shame one's coldness. But I should put Ruskin

at the head of all. Like a great coinage of a king, every tiniest token bears his visible and noble imprint. All through his life, a part of his day's work was writing letters; and he threw himself with his utmost force and his sensitive sympathy into the very mind and heart of his correspondent. I have said before how his letters to men of marked individuality bear unmistakable traces, in their words and phrases, of being transfused with the imagined thoughts of their recipients. And then, too, every smallest letter that he wrote was a part of himself. There are two large volumes of them in the big edition of his works, and there must be hundreds more in existence. Only the other day I stumbled upon a great collection of them, written to a girl whom he had never seen, and all growing out of one simple and sincere question which she had asked him.

It was here that his extraordinary power of transition helped him. He could pass from simple gossip to deep pathos, from unaffected simplicity to pettish and extravagant censure, from caressing tenderness to poignant irony. He never said less or more than he thought and felt; but the grace and beauty with which

he invested it all, was born of no effort or taking thought; it was simply himself. One of my hearers brought me the other day, after a lecture, a dozen letters of Ruskin's that he had picked up in a curiosity shop. There it was, that whimsical and solemn charm—a letter of almost heart-rending sorrow, speaking of his need for human affection, just salted at the end out of sentimentality by a pungent phrase of irony, in which he stood aside and smilingly surveyed his own dismay. Part of his mysterious attractiveness was that he could speak so frankly of himself and his failures, with such passionate sincerity, and then make light of it all, as the self-pity melted under humorous perception. There is plenty of bitterness, but no spite; abundant pettishness, but not a trace of pettiness. Of course it is easy to call them egotistical; and I do not attempt to deny that Ruskin took a deep interest in himself—we most of us do. But egotism is the taking oneself solemnly and seriously, with a gloomy and self-regarding pomposity, and Ruskin never did that. He was full of intense personal feeling, was profoundly convinced of the worth and significance of his message, sorrowed poignantly over his

ineffectiveness, and the misguided way in which he was misinterpreted. But just when the shower is falling heavily, till the world seems dissolved in wet, there comes a gleam of dancing sunshine with a tint of sapphire sky, which makes even the slanting rain beautiful, and dashes a gleam of gold upon drenched leaf and watery rut. I should do him wrong if I insisted too much upon his sorrow and heaviness, for there was a strain of real gaiety about him, which made him love all young and joyful and lighthearted things. I will read two or three of those letters in illustration of all this:—

"I knew you would deeply feel the death of Dickens. It is very frightful to me—among the blows struck by the fates at worthy men, while all mischievous ones have ceaseless strength. The literary loss is infinite—the political one I care less for than you do. Dickens was a pure modernist—a leader of the steam-whistle party *par excellence*—and he had no understanding of any power of antiquity except a sort of jackdaw sentiment for cathedral towers. He knew nothing of the nobler power of superstition—was essentially a stage manager, and used everything for effect on the pit. His Christmas meant mistletoe and pudding—neither resurrection from dead, nor rising of new stars, nor teaching of wise men, nor shepherds.

His hero is essentially the ironmaster; in spite of *Hard Times*, he has advanced by his influence every principle that makes them harder—the love of excitement, in all classes, and the fury of business competition, and the distrust both of nobility and clergy which, wide enough and fatal enough, and too justly founded, needed no apostle to the mob, but a grave teacher of priests and nobles themselves, from whom Dickens had essentially no word. . . ."

And again:—

"[The letters] of Emerson and Carlyle came to me about a week since, and I am nearly through them, grateful heartily for the book, and the masterful index; but much disappointed at having no word of epitaph from yourself on both the men.

"The Emerson letters are infinitely sweet and wise: here and there, as in p. 30, vol. ii., unintelligible to me. C.'s., like all the words of him published since his death, have vexed me, and partly angered, with their perpetual *me miserum*—never seeming to feel the extreme ill manners of this perpetual whine; and, to what one dares not call an affected, but a quite unconsciously false extent, hiding the more or less of pleasure which a strong man must have in using his strength, be it but in heaving aside dust-heaps.

"What in my own personal way I chiefly regret and wonder at in him is, the perception in all nature of nothing between the stars and his stomach—his going, for instance, into North

Wales for two months, and noting absolutely no Cambrian thing or event, but only increase of Carlylian bile.

"Not that I am with you in thinking Froude wrong about the *Reminiscences*. They are to me full of his strong insight, and in their distress, far more pathetic than these howlings of his earlier life about Cromwell and others of his quite best works; but I am vexed for want of a proper Epilogue of your own. . . .

"How much better right than C. have I to say, 'Ay de mi'?"

I will only say one word in conclusion. I would not persuade any one to try and write like Ruskin, though he was probably the greatest master of English prose, in his variety, his copiousness, the lucidity and the perennial beauty of his expression; but just as one cannot live by bread alone, one cannot write by imitation. It is a very elementary literary exercise to parody a style, and Ruskin lends himself easily to parody. Indeed his style is so contagious that if one reads him much and attentively, one finds it hard not to write like him; like him, I say, yet ah, how far away! But every writer must find his own method of expression, and no man can look his best in borrowed clothes. The curvature of the owner hangs indelibly about them.

But on the other hand, as I have tried to show, there are few writers of whom the word *great* can be used so incontestably. While other writers have been like performers in a great orchestra, spouting melody from a silver-mouthed trumpet, or drawing out the thrill and shiver of the tense string, Ruskin seems to me like a great organist, manipulating and combining and hushing the huge house of sound, with its myriad pipes and ranked ingenuities. There is no writer—and this is, I humbly believe, the end and crown of art—who could express so perfectly, so sweetly, so truly, the thought that rose swiftly and burningly in his mind. He could flash out, with a deft turn of his wrist, a stop of shrill emotion, and keep a dozen moods all in full play at once, combining and eluding and charming, in a sequence at once orderly and profound. We may read Ruskin then primarily for the glow and beauty that he casts on life; but not forget that half that thought must have been dumb, its deepest feeling and its lightest grace unuttered, if it had not been for the art which, through endless labour, widest sympathy, and sternest purpose, gave him the power to tell his secret so that all can understand. These are the two conditions of art; that a man should

have something in him that is worth telling and making plain; and after that that he should spare no trouble, despise no criticism, and yet be disheartened by no rebuke, from saying the thoughts of his heart as calmly, as clearly, and as expressively as he can.

THE END

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